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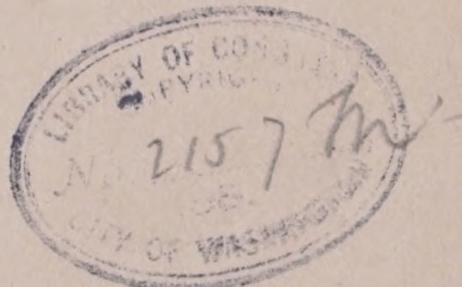
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HIS WAY
TO
GREATNESS.



PHILADELPHIA:
E. CLAXTON & COMPANY,
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1881.

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“She had one idol, and she had lost it; one power,
and it had failed her. In the heaven above, and in the
earth beneath, was neither peace, nor help, nor hope;
nothing but blank, black, stupid terror and despair.”

KINGSLEY.

“Though the mills of God grind slowly,
Yet they grind exceeding small;
Though He stands and waits with patience,
With exactness grinds He all.”

HIS WAY TO GREATNESS.

CHAPTER I.

The world's infectious; few bring back at eve,
Immaculate, the manners of the morn.
Something we thought, is blotted; we resolved,
Is shaken; we renounced, returns again.—YOUNG.

SOME writer has said that a woman's life never really begins until her marriage; if this be true, then Marguerite Van Cleaf would begin to live on the morrow. Thus far existence had been to her little more than one long, pleasant, summer day, wherein she had grown tall and strong, just as the birds grow in song and flight, and the flowers bloom into fulness of leaf and blossom. Somerton comprised her world, and yonder pretty white villa, with its woodbine and running roses, and called, from the fine old trees that surrounded it, The Maples, represented her kingdom.

One might travel far and in many lands, and never see a lovelier spot than this picturesque valley through which flowed the blue waters of the Juniata, its winding course overshadowed by lofty mountains, tree-clad from base to summit, and as wildly primeval in appearance as when the foot of the red man alone trod its unbroken solitudes.

Richard Van Cleaf married late in life a young and beautiful girl to whom he was devotedly attached; but she died within the year of their marriage, leaving an infant daughter but a few hours old. The early death of his wife affected him deeply, and Richard Van Cleaf was never again the bright, cheery, companionable man he had formerly been. Being a gentleman of scholarly habits and fond of books, he had no desire, after his sad bereavement, to leave this quiet nook among the hills, where the few brief happy days of his married life had been spent, and enter again the world's jarring strife.

Marguerite had never been "away to school," and therefore was entirely wanting in that worldly wisdom which passeth the understanding of any but the young lady graduate of a

fashionable boarding-school. She had no taste for what polite society terms "fine accomplishments"—waltzing until one is out of breath, singing whether one has a voice or not, and thrumming a piano at all times and places, without the smallest regard to the wishes or comfort of those unfortunate beings who may not be musically inclined. Marguerite did none of these things, but she delighted in the clear, sweet song of a bird, the low, rippling murmur of the river, and the bloom and fragrance of a flower. In these Marguerite found a music and poetry which she both understood and loved, for she lived very near to Nature's great prodigal heart, and knew more about the wonders contained in a drop of water than she did about the dizzy ecstasies of the waltz.

Eighteen, and to be married to-morrow! So young, so inexperienced, so unacquainted with herself, and the quiet, happy, girl-life already past. Perhaps it was this suddenly awakened thought that gave her face its troubled look, and filled her eyes with a new and strangely solemn light.

"To-morrow! oh, to-morrow!" she sighed a little sadly. "To-morrow, at this time, I shall have said good-by to my dear old home, and whether it be for better or for worse, who can tell?"

The leaves of the Austrian maples seemed to echo the sigh, and rustled and shivered in a lonesome, complaining way as if they, too, were asking of the whispering breeze the question Marguerite was asking of herself. A robin, singing its vesper hymn in the hazel copse down by the river, grew suddenly silent, and only the musical flow of the water broke the dreamful stillness.

Marguerite was not beautiful,—no one ever thought her that,—but she was slender and graceful, with intelligent gray eyes, and a mouth and chin which in themselves were the perfection of womanly loveliness. But her forehead was much too large and full to suit the exacting

requirements of beauty, and she had no color such as by right belongs to youth. Yet there was a something of strength and force about Marguerite Van Cleaf that made one feel as if she had within her undeveloped depths of soul, and a singularly pure and truthful nature that would turn with a fine scorn from all that was little and mean and false.

The sun slowly disappeared behind the mountains, leaving the whole western sky flooded with crimson. Trees, river, and hills caught the rosy reflection of the clouds, and the day that had been so bright bade the world good-night, canopied by hues of unrivalled splendor, and followed by long, quivering rays of golden and purple light.

Marguerite cast a last wistful, lingering look over the familiar landscape as she entered the house, and the rosy glow of the sky faded before the silent advance of the night. The young moon showed its silver disk above the tree-tops; a star or two peeped shyly forth, while the flush of the sunset yet lingered in the west, and the wind, that had played with the leaves all day, crept into the blossoms of the white lilacs, and shook out such an abundance of sweet scents that the air was heavy with their fragrance.

Mr. Van Cleaf sat in his large, crimson-cushioned easy-chair, in the pleasantest corner of the quaint, oak-panelled library, thinking of the daughter who was so soon to leave him and the old home where she had spent all her glad young life. The book he had been reading lay open on the table before him, but it was not altogether the twilight that darkened his vision and made him see near objects indistinctly. A thin, shapely hand rested on either arm of the chair, and the gray eyes, bent in sad reflection on the floor, looked as they did the day he kissed Marguerite's mother for the last time, as she lay in her coffin waiting to be laid away under the April grasses.

A light step approached his chair, a pretty hand fell gently on his shoulder, and Marguerite bent and kissed the snow-white hair that was fine and soft as spun silk. It had been white ever since she could remember, and her baby fancy had likened it to the wind-blown down of the thistle, which she had seen float away in the autumn air like gossamer threads of silver when she was but a wee, winsome thing not much taller than her father's knee.

"You will not be very lonely when I am gone, will you, papa dear?" she said, very tenderly. "I shall be thinking of you sitting

here alone in the gloaming, with no one at all to love you. I cannot see your eyes for the dusk, but I know they are sad, as eyes can be, with a something of sorrow in them that you would fain hide from me. My existence was all too dearly bought, so dearly that I sometimes wonder how you could ever find it in your heart to love me; and now I forsake you, ungrateful and selfish creature that I am." There were tears in her voice, and a look of unspeakable regret in her eyes.

"Hush, my darling. You are neither selfish nor ungrateful. I ought not to expect to keep my child always. A little lonely I may be, but I shall be happy in knowing that you are so, my daughter."

"But I may not be happy; who can tell? I may come to wish that it had never been—that I had never left you."

"It is too late to think of that now. Maurice is not just the one I'd have chosen for my daughter's husband; but since she chose him for herself, I'll not withhold my blessing, or doubt for a single moment her hopes of future happiness. He is a little worldly, more so than I like, but he has no bad habits that I know of, and if principle keep pace with ambition, he will soon win for himself an enviable name among the ablest thinkers and workers of the age. He is a man of no mean ability, I feel quite sure of that, and one who will love and care for my Daisy as she deserves to be loved and cared for."

Marguerite's answer was a sigh, a long in-drawn breath that welled up from her troubled heart, and would not be repressed.

At this timely juncture Jeannette Andrews, the old housekeeper, came to say that tea was ready, and to remind them that Miss Marguerite's pretty sitting-room was a much more cheerful place wherein to spend the evening than the wainscoted library, with its polished oak book-cases and row upon row of books.

Mr. Van Cleaf laid his daughter's hand on his arm, and they left the library together, walking side by side with a kind of stately grace peculiarly their own.

Mrs. Andrews placed the silver tea-service before her young mistress with marked solemnity. "It is the last time, Miss Marguerite, the very last time you will sit in the old place, with the old look and the old smile on your bonny face. You have never been out of my sight a whole day since you were born, and now to think that you are going away to-morrow for good

and all. It is just heart-breaking, that's what it is, and I don't know how we are ever to get over it."

The affectionate old creature put her apron to her eyes and fled precipitately to the kitchen, there to recount to Susan the house-maid and Caleb the gardener, for the hundred and fiftieth time, "that no good ever came of a May marriage."

Maurice Ware was not a person given to bestowing much attention on the beauties of Nature. All seasons of the year were alike to him, and clouds and sunshine were only periods of time that went towards making up a day. A star might shine, a bird might sing, a flower might bloom; but the star he did not see, the bird's song he did not hear, and the flower he trampled upon, for he was eminently a practical man, without an atom of poetry in his nature, nor a grain of fine feeling. Still, the world esteemed him a man of excellent promise, and predicted his rapid advancement in the world's honors and preferments. To do him justice, Maurice was well liked in Somerton, for everybody thought him a young fellow of the most correct habits, a careful, hard-working student, with no spendthrift tastes and no bad associates. Above all, was he not to marry Marguerite Van Cleaf, a girl of good family, who would have money, and who could, through her relationship with old Judge Van Cleaf, her father's only brother, materially advance his interests in a direction where he was most anxious they should be advanced.

That which Maurice Ware undertook to do he did well, and once he had made up his mind to marry Marguerite, he set about the preliminary task of wooing her with a business-like dispatch and earnestness that might have been commendable, had his purpose been less selfish or his object less sordid. But Maurice was not over-nice in the means employed to gain his ends. Cool, calculating, and ambitious, the main thing to be considered were results not motives, and marrying after all was a mere matter of business, and should be entered into with business tact and discretion. So thought the clear-headed young lawyer as he walked along the quiet country road on his way to see Marguerite this last night before his marriage.

Not once did it cross his mind that he was unworthy of her, unworthy even to touch the hand that to-morrow would be his absolutely until death did them part. Not once did it occur to him that he was bringing to the girl,

who to-morrow would be his wife, the ashes of a burnt-out and unhallowed love, if so poor a passion, so false and flitting a shadow as he had known, could be called love. But how could the world or Marguerite know Maurice Ware, when Maurice Ware did not know himself? As well might one hope to know the abiding place of the winds, or fix unalterably the shifting sands of the sea.

The road led for a little distance through a dense growth of pine-trees, many of which were sombre old giants half a century old, and grew so near the river, which, at this point, made a bold curve, that they looked, to one viewing them from the opposite shore, as if intently admiring their own darkly reflected image in the clear running water. The ground beneath, thickly strewn with dry pine needles and crisp brown cones, was as soft and yielding to the footstep as a carpet of velvet, while overhead soughed the wind, laden with resinous odors as fresh and dewy as the night. Ever at midday it was always dark, cool, and silent under the pines; but now, with the dusk of evening creeping through the low-growing branches, it was oppressively still. Only the low, hovering sigh of the wind and the restless lap of the water, no other sound was audible. But the weird stillness and gloom were nothing to Maurice Ware, who walked along briskly, whistling a cheery tune to while away the time, not to keep his spirits up, for he was a brave man, and one who was on most excellent terms with himself. His self-satisfied whistle, however, came to an abrupt termination when a dark figure suddenly emerged from the shadows and stood directly in the path before him.

"Maurice!"

The voice that uttered his name was sweet and low, like a note of music heard unexpectedly in some strange, unlooked-for place.

"Maurice!"

He stopped, and stood as if rooted to the ground. Never before in all his life had he been so completely taken off his guard, so utterly astonished. But he was a man of strong and resolute will; one to face a danger, not fly from it, quick to think and to act, and with little or no heart to influence humanely his actions. And being such a man, he was not likely to be long put out by the sudden and most unwelcome appearance of this miserable woman, or child rather, for she seemed more a child than a woman. In a moment he had recovered his composure, and even in that dim, unsteady light

one could see his strong, handsome face grow stern as fate.

"Why are you here, Agnes? What does your presence mean at this time and place?"

"Why am I here? Have I not a right to be here?" she answered, meekly, and in a tone so low as to be scarcely audible above the murmur of the pines.

"Certainly not. I am tired of you. I have told you so before, not in so many words, perhaps, but the inference was plain enough. And as to rights, you have none, none whatever, either in law or in reason."

The girl seemed to shrink beneath the pitiless glance of his black, wrathful eyes like a beaten spaniel that loves, yet fears, its master.

"I am hungry and homeless and miserable, Maurice. I have suffered so much, and I—"

"What have I to do with your being hungry and homeless and miserable?" he roughly interrupted, not a whit softened by her attitude of abject entreaty or the patient sweetness of her voice.

"What have you to do with it? Did you not make me what I am, a creature too bad to live and too wicked to die? And you promised, oh, you did most solemnly promise, Maurice, to make me your wife."

"My wife!" he replied, with a scornful laugh that was far more bitter for her to hear than the enduring of a thousand deaths. "And you really believed so sorry a promise? You were a very simple, pretty girl. I might have been rather fond of you at one time, and no doubt said many silly things, which you were still more silly to believe. But marry you, a washer-woman's daughter, bah! I found you in a garret, and I left you there, and no particular harm done, as I can see."

"Spare me," she cried, with a passionate burst of tears, "spare me at least your censure. I have not deserved that, Maurice, not from you. You found me an innocent child, who loved you and thought you as good and noble as you seemed to be. You left me a ruined outcast, flung aside like a weed that had dared to grow for a little while in the place where you now seek to transplant a flower. I have neither the will nor the wish to do you harm, yet they say that even a worm will turn when trodden upon. If you had killed me when you wearied of me, how much better it would have been for me, how much nobler of you."

"Killing is against the law," he replied, coolly. "Now understand me, Agnes, there

must be an end of this. I'll have no scenes, mind you. A folly of two years ago is a matter I am in no mood to remember at present."

The woman he had wronged past any but a woman's forgiveness looked up in his face with a kind of dumb anguish, as if, hearing, she could not understand, and seeing, she could not believe.

"And you will marry her—you will marry Marguerite Van Cleaf to-morrow?"

"I assuredly will."

"And you dare to do it. Setting aside my broken heart and ruined life, you dare offer to this girl, who is as pure as one of God's own angels, your soiled and worthless affection?"

"Pooh! A man is a man. You exaggerate trifles."

"And a woman is a woman. If Marguerite Van Cleaf loves you, I pity her—from my soul I pity her. And I charge you, as you value her love, keep from her the *trifles* of your life; for, believe me, she will turn from you with utter loathing should she ever come to know you as I know you. I saw her to-day, and —"

"You saw Marguerite?"

He took a menacing step forward, his face white with anger; but the girl's blue eyes met his unflinchingly. He had no further power to wound her; and, with a courage born of despair, she cared not what he did or what became of her.

"I begged my way to Somerton. A woman, who lives in the little house at the cross-roads, told me her name was Marguerite—Marguerite Van Cleaf, the girl whom you are to marry. I saw her, to-day, down there by the river. I had but to speak, and there would be no wedding to-morrow. But I did not wish to break her heart because mine is broken. I did not wish to ruin you because you have ruined me. I only wished to see you because I—I love you. Despised, trampled upon, laughed at, still I love you. One kind word, one kind look even, and I'll go down to the river and end my misery there. I'll never cross your path again. I'll go away in my rags and shame and trouble you no more."

Sobbing bitterly, she threw herself on the ground at his feet, and lay a mere heap of breathing wretchedness.

For all his cold-blooded heartlessness, Maurice Ware was human; and the girl was young and fair, and had slept in his bosom, poor child, never doubting for a moment the treacherous heart beating beneath her trusting head.

He laid a not unkindly hand on her shoulder, and easily as he would have lifted an infant in his arm raised her unresistingly to her feet.

"I will not see you starve," he said, with some degree of feeling. "Here is money; take it; and if I prosper you shall not want, at least, for bread. Only don't be foolish. All women are fools, I suppose, and it is all a man can do to manage them when once they fancy themselves injured."

She pushed back her disordered hair, and the moon, that was shining so brightly over the maples and the plump-white lilacs, shone down on the face of the girl who, though so young, had reached the very utmost of human misery. The pines, almost meeting overhead, permitted that one little wandering ray to touch for a moment her golden hair and flushed, tear-wet cheeks.

"There is one woman you will not find a fool," she said, slowly; "one woman you will not be able to manage, should she ever fancy herself injured. Therefore take heed, Maurice Ware, and if you marry Marguerite Van Cleaf, be true to her."

Strange as it may appear, the girl did not cherish a single unkind thought towards the one for whom she had been forsaken, because Marguerite "did not know." That conviction seemed to have fixed itself firmly in her mind, somewhat to the consolation of her own misery. Marguerite did not know, consequently Marguerite was ignorant of her lover's perfidy, and Agnes was much too gentle in her nature to desire revenge or seek to visit upon the head of her rival the wrong of which she was wholly innocent.

It struck Mr. Ware as being rather odd that she should plead so earnestly for Marguerite's happiness to the utter destruction of her own; but women were queer creatures at best, and Agnes always had a way of putting her heart under the foot of any one who might choose to walk upon it. So reasoned this man who was wise in the world's ways, and might come in time to judge men for the very crime of which he himself was guilty. He turned from the girl impatiently, a frown contracting his forehead.

"Nonsense! Miss Van Cleaf's happiness will be quite safe in my keeping. You were one thing; my wife will be my wife: quite a different state of affairs, I fancy."

"Not so different but that my fate may be simply the foreshadowing of hers, save that your wife will have the law and public opinion for her safeguard, while I had only—you."

"Please remember that I love Miss Van Cleaf, and therein she may possibly find a safeguard stronger than any either the law or public opinion could give her."

"Possibly."

Agnes echoed the word vaguely. "And do you really love her, Maurice?"

"Of course I do."

"And you never loved me—never?"

"No; I never did."

The words did not come readily, for he knew in his heart that he lied. "A man can be fond of what pleases him without his being at all in love. You pleased me for awhile, I'll not deny that; but it is over and done with now. I wish you well, I'm sure, and so good-night."

With that he turned to leave her, but she put out a detaining hand.

"Stay a moment, and tell me why it is that you do not fear me? You know that a word from me will stop this marriage. Some women might not care; but Marguerite Van Cleaf, were she to know you for the false-hearted man you are, and always will be,—if I read her face aright, and I am grown very wise through wrong and suffering,—would sooner hold her hand in the fire than place it in yours to keep and to hold for all her future life. And so I ask, why is it that you do not fear me?"

"Because," he paused, lifted her face to the moonlight, looked full into the large, gentle eyes that followed his every movement with a sort of wistful, silent questioning, like a dog that is not sure of its master's temper, and deliberately kissed the quivering lips that excitement, grief, and indignation had crimsoned a deeper hue than ever burnt in the heart of a rose, "because you love me, and so, loving me above all others, I have no enemy in Agnes Brandon."

"You are wise and generous, Maurice Ware. Love you I did, love you now I do not. I have been your plaything and your pleasure, but, fallen and wretched as I am, I could not longer love a creature so utterly despicable as yourself. Take back your money. I'll have none of it. Better to die than to live by such unworthy means."

She dashed the silver he had given her to the ground and fled swiftly away in the ghostly darkness. The shadows of the great pines seemed to close around her in silent pity and deaden the very sound of her fleeing footsteps, so quickly and noiselessly did she disappear within their friendly shelter.

Maurice Ware resumed his walk towards The

Maples in no enviable frame of mind. He must make the best of it, of course. It was not really anything to worry about. A mere nothing, shrugging his broad shoulders derisively as he hurried on, and feeling very ill at ease, though he tried to appear otherwise.

"What an abominable nuisance a woman can make of herself, when she finds out that a fellow is tired of her. Why can't they submit to a thing of this sort with a good grace? They ought to know it can't go on forever. A man is bound to make a break sooner or later. Agnes is a foolish, affectionate, little creature, without a particle of common sense; but she *might* have played me a shabby trick had she been so inclined. Women generally are so revengeful when they feel themselves at all slighted. Old Van Cleaf, with his high-flown notions of honor, would raise a deuce of a fuss if the story should reach his ears, and Marguerite undoubtedly would think it her duty to break off the marriage at once and forever."

Thus considering the matter, and walking rapidly, he soon came in sight of The Maples. There waited Marguerite the coming of him who would be her husband to-morrow. Yonder among the pines wandered Agnes, friendless and homeless; yet the man's conscience troubled him not. He even laughed softly to himself, when he thought of how cleverly he had "managed her."

True, there was a nameless, ugly something in the ceaseless wash of the river, which moved him strangely. What ghastly thing might it not drift shoreward, even while he listened? A drowned woman might lie there among the willows, stark and still, with a white, wet face upturned to the silent heavens, and pale, parted lips oozing water like great cold tears.

He shuddered in spite of himself, afraid of the terrible "something" that might confront him on the morrow, and in some manner be brought home to him. Pshaw! He would not think of it. Few women drown themselves, considering the many unhappy ones there are in the world. He pulled together his courage and resolutely banished from his mind the haunting fear that, to say the least, was very disquieting even to a man of his iron nerve. But when Marguerite met him at the door, fifteen minutes after his stormy parting with Agnes, Mr. Ware was quite himself, and greeted his betrothed most affectionately.

"You are late," she said, as they entered the sitting-room where Mr. Van Cleaf sat rather

more silent than the occasion warranted, for, try as he would, he could not quite like the young man. The fault was his own, perhaps, for he could give no reason for *not* liking him.

Did Marguerite really and truly love Maurice Ware?

Yes. She looked up to, believed in, and trusted him with her whole heart. He was a handsome, stalwart young man of twenty-six, with intensely black eyes, dark hair and beard, and a massive breadth of brow that appeared to carry back of it any amount of brains. Taking it altogether, it was a strikingly strong, intellectual face, and it is no wonder Marguerite gave him her heart for the asking, for the outward temple was fair enough to have shrined the noblest soul God ever made.

Aye, Marguerite loved him. Simply and purely loved him, but to retain her love he must be what she thought him to be—truthful, sincere, and honest. The mask once laid aside, her confidence abused, her trust betrayed, her love lightly treated, and Marguerite Van Cleaf was just the woman to turn from him as from one who had forfeited all right to either her duty or respect, much more her wisely affection. But at present all these ungracious possibilities were hidden deeper than her young eyes had yet learned to see, so she merely remarked, in her quiet way, "You are late, Maurice," and Mr. Van Cleaf gave the young man his hand, taking himself severely to task the while because he could not find it in his heart to like Mr. Ware as he would wish to like his daughter's husband.

"Yes, I am rather late," he said, taking a seat on the sofa beside Marguerite. "I was detained at my lodgings by an unexpected business call. The gentleman was in a hurry to leave town this evening, so, of course, I had to see him, little as I desired to do so."

Ah, how easily and naturally he told the lie. It argues ill for your happiness, Marguerite, only "you do not know," and blest be the ignorance that keeps you forever from knowing his baseness!

The evening passed quietly. Had a stranger been present, unacquainted with the fact, he would never have dreamed that those two sitting in such unlover-like ease on the sofa were to be married to-morrow. The girl came and stood by her father's chair; somehow she wanted to be near him, and she knew he wanted her, for he looked up in her face, oh, so tenderly. "My daisy," he whispered, "my one little

winsome daisy, that grew all alone in the old home, and kept one spot bright and green in her old father's heart."

"Papa, dear, dear papa!"

The tears in her eyes so blinded her that she could only see her father's dear gray head, and fortunate tears they were, since they prevented her from noticing the disapproving frown with which Maurice chose to regard what he termed her "nonsensical sentiment." To tell the truth, that very matter-of-fact gentleman was secretly glad when the time came for him to go, for he felt dull and a trifle upset, notwithstanding his heroic resolve not to trouble himself about Agnes.

He arose to take his departure somewhat more stiffly than became a lover on the eve of his marriage.

In a second Marguerite was by his side.

"Forgive me, Maurice. But papa has only me, and he does love me dearly."

"And so do I."

The chill in his voice was lost in the warmth of his smile; woman-like she was pleased, and pardoned the sternness which was born of his love. His love, indeed!

"You will have me always, for all my life; but papa, after to-night, will have me no more. I am only a little brown wren, as papa sometimes calls me, but I've chirped about The Maples ever since the day I first saw the light, and so they have come to love me, and will miss me, sadly miss me, when I am gone."

He put his arm around her, drew her head down upon his breast, and kissed her on lips and forehead.

He had looked in a lovelier face than Marguerite's since this day's sun had set; he had kissed lips as sweet, and held under his magnetic spell wide, violet eyes that were far more beautiful than ever Marguerite's calm, gray eyes could ever be. The one was unlearned and poor, the other stood by him in silken attire, the joy and pride of her home; but it were hard to tell which of the two were to be the most pitied.

Out again under the stars, and that unpleasant vision of the river returned to him with redoubled force. The dread object his fancy conjured up as floating somewhere among the willows, down there where the river made a bold sweep, and the pines stood dark and grim against the starlit sky. He stopped once or twice and cast a hurried look around him, but everything was as still as death. Not an insect

piped; not a leaf stirred. The moon rode high in the heavens, silvering brightly the tops of the trees and the broad surface of the Juniata. But young Ware was no coward. He boldly plunged into the labyrinth of shadows, and if man, woman, or ghost were hidden there, he did not fear them. Nevertheless, he drew a long breath of relief when the pines were well behind him, and he was again in the clear, serene moonlight. He was not conscience-smitten, remorseful, or anything of that sort. He did not regret the past, or promise himself to do better in the future. It was only annoying, and made a fellow feel a little nervous, that's all. Had he not read somewhere that "best men are moulded out of faults"? If Agnes would not drown herself, and would keep away from him, why, that were an end of the matter; and so thinking and so hoping, Maurice Ware calmly laid his head on his pillow that night and slept as soundly as if Agnes Brandon had never existed, and to-morrow were not his wedding-day.

Half an hour after her lover's departure, Marguerite bade her father good-night and went up to her room. The south window commanded a fine view of the river, with the mountains looming darkly in the distance, and the Somerton hills rising one above the other in a long, unbroken chain of wood-crowned heights. Her trunks were already packed, and on the bed lay her wedding dress, a filmy combination of satin and lace, which she would put on in the morning, and down there in the little Gothic church, half hidden in English ivy, she would be married.

The door noiselessly opened and the old housekeeper entered the room. Jeannette, always a privileged person, was infinitely so to-night.

"I'll brush your hair, deary, and see you snug in bed, as I've done every night of your life," she said, striving to assume a cheerfulness she was very far from feeling.

"How kind you are, dear, faithful old Jeannette. What will I ever do without you? And what a lovely evening it is. I don't feel a bit sleepy; so I'll sit here by the window, and make friends with the stars while you do the brushing."

Marguerite shook down her heavy brown hair, letting it fall about her shapely shoulders like a veil, and seated herself by the low, open window. "There, now, you may brush as much and as long as you please. How plainly

one can hear the murmur of the river. I never remember hearing it so distinctly before."

Jeannette was the best-hearted old creature in the world, but she was apt to speak her mind both in and out of season, and believed in "signs" and unlucky days as religiously as ever the pious *Aeneas* believed in the Sibyl of Cumæ.

"To-morrow you will be far enough away from the sound of the river," bemoaned the good soul, as she absently threaded the bright brown tresses through her withered old fingers. "There is no good in a May wedding they say; but whether it be May or June, there's plenty of care and sorrow afore you, dear. It's what marriage always brings to a woman, and is a part of the punishment Eve's transgression brought upon us, I suppose; though I don't see why it should."

"Helen Arnold was married in May, and she is very happy," mused Marguerite.

"Helen has only been married a year and a day, and George Arnold is Somerton born and bred. Not as I hold that a fault against Mr. Ware. But he is a lawyer, and lawyers have no heart; leastwise, I never heard of their ever having any to speak of," said Jeannette, very solemnly, and using the brush as a kind of wand to emphasize, as it were, her somewhat sweeping assertion.

"Oh, Jeannette, you are too severe in your judgment. The lawyers would never forgive you, if they were to hear you speak so ill of them," laughed Marguerite.

"And little I care for their displeasure," she went on, stoutly. "I warrant you will find more brains than heart among the best of them. I am not the person to say anything against a man's having brains, but I must say I like feeling better, and a heart that's warmer and softer than a stone."

Marguerite made no reply. Her eyes had left the long avenue of maples, and were fixed on the little hill on the opposite side of the river. Down almost to the water's edge it was thickly dotted with fir and cedar, above which here and there a marble shaft arose, looking more white and solemn in the pale moonlight than Marguerite had ever seen them look before. She drew a deep, full breath.

"Tell me about my mother, Jeannette. Am I like her?"

"You have your mother's mouth and smile and bonny brown hair, but your eyes and brow are like your father's." Jeannette was in her

element now. Nothing delighted her more than to talk of Marguerite's infant days, and the young mother who died a weary while ago.

"Ah, it was a sad enough time for us all when we buried her,—so young, so beautiful, and so happy, and you a little wailing mite of a thing only three days old. Mr. Van Cleaf took his grief so to heart that, had it not been for you, he'd not long have remained behind her." Jeannette paused in her brushing to wipe her eyes, for the tears were getting the better of her failing sight, and one or two big, bright drops did actually splash down on Marguerite's hair. "He loved you so much, oh, so much. When you were a little tot, no taller than a meadow daisy, he would hold you in his arms by the hour, and kiss your little sleeping face, and whisper through his tears the name of that other Marguerite who was lying yonder on the hillside, with so much earth above her that only the voice of God at the last great day will ever reach her."

"Poor, poor papa!"

The words were scarcely more than a sigh, but Marguerite's heart breathed in them, and she, who wept so rarely, was crying now as softly and silently as the evening dew was falling on the crimson buds of the maples.

"Ah, well, it's no use grieving. It was to be, no doubt, or it wouldn't have been," said Jeannette, with melancholy philosophy. "It happened long ago, although it seems but yesterday since I saw her carried down the garden walk, with the April sunshine glinting warm on the hills, and the pines all a-rustle with the April wind."

"I can't tell why it is, Jeannette, but I want my mother to-night. I sat for more than an hour this afternoon by her grave thinking, thinking, thinking of oh so many things. I hope when I die they will lay me there beside my mother, where I shall think no more."

"Oh, hush, deary; it sounds prophetic-like, and you to be married of a May."

"That does not matter. Death and trouble and grief are everywhere, and come at all times and places."

"That is true enough," moralized Jeannette. "Death is something we can't hide or run away from, and it needs the temper of an angel, and the patience of a saint, to get along with a husband. Not that I'd be thought to reflect upon my Jacob. He has been dead this many a year, but I must say he had his contrary ways. Men ain't like women in their loving."

It is *all* of us, while it is only a part of them."

"I remember Jacob very well, and he was kind to me," said Marguerite, smiling at Jeannette's quaint analysis of husbands in general, and her own dead Jacob in particular.

"And who wouldn't be kind to you, a wee, motherless thing, so good and loving as you always were, and never getting into mischief?" Jeannette replied, warm in praise of the infant virtues of her nursling. "You never lacked for care or affection, if you were motherless; I must say that for myself, which reminds me of the poor white-faced creature I saw at the kitchen-door to-day. *She* looked as if she'd never known what it was to have a home, much less love or care, and where she came from, or what she wanted, is more than I know. Caleb said he saw her down by the old hawthorn just before sunset, and she seemed sort o' daft."

"Why did you not ask the poor thing to come in, and find out what she wanted? She might have been hungry."

"So I meant to do. She did not appear to be exactly of the beggar class, though her dress was old and worn, and the shabby old bonnet and rag of a veil she wore had certainly seen their best days. She just stood still and stared straight afore her, the deathly whiteness of her face showing through the veil, I noticed that much; but I can't for the life of me tell whether she had blue eyes or black. I was about speaking to her, when old Bruno came running along with his great hoarse bark, and she turned and ran away, without saying a word, as fast as ever she could."

"Some poor unhappy wanderer, no doubt. I hope she has found shelter somewhere."

"Oh, you may be sure of it. There, I've brushed your hair until it shines like satin, and now I'll put away your wedding dress, for it's time you were asleep. Ah, me, I can't bring myself to believe that you are going to be married to-morrow, and of a May, too."

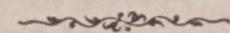
Old Jeannette lifted the dress as reverently as if it were a shroud, and as carefully as if the delicate materials of which it was composed were as perishable and as easily marred as the down on a butterfly's wing.

"Say your prayers, and go to bed right away," admonished Jeannette, as she closed the door after putting away the precious dress and kissing Marguerite good-night. But Marguerite did not go to bed. She still sat by the open window long after Jeannette's heavy breathing

proclaimed that worthy soul to be far away in the mysterious realm of sleep. Midnight! All the world seemed to be hushed in slumber. Marguerite stole down stairs and quietly as a shadow entered her father's room. A shaded night-lamp burned on the antique stand in one corner of the spacious chamber. Had Marguerite found her father awake, her heart would have been sadder than it then was. But he was asleep, sweetly, soundly asleep. His gray hair fell loosely over the pillow, and his white old hands lay on the counterpane so pale and still that they appeared to have neither pulse nor warmth. She bent and kissed his hands, his hair, and slumbering eyes.

"My dear, dear old father!"

It was only a thought, her touch did not awaken him. The kiss was as lightly given as the fall of a rose-leaf. How glad she was, how infinitely glad, to know her father could sleep so tranquilly. Perhaps he would not miss her so much, after all. She might be the lonelier of the two, the lonelier and the sadder in that new, strange home whither she was going so soon. She crept back to her chamber greatly comforted, closed the window, said her prayers, and went to bed. Being young and healthy, and not given to indulging in morbid fancies, she was soon asleep, the last sleep she would ever know as Marguerite Van Cleaf.



CHAPTER II.

Well I know
'T were hopeless for Humanity to dream
Of Honesty in such infected blood.—BYRON.

MAURICE WARE was the eldest son of a country clergyman with a limited salary and a very large family. He obtained his education by sheer hard work, and by practising the severest economy. At the very outset of his career he had determined to be rich, and hew out for himself an enviable niche in the world's temple of fame. To this end he bent all his energies, and kept ever before him the bright reward which he vowed should one day crown his efforts. While at school he lodged with a widow, Mrs. Tully by name, who was pleased to speak of herself "as a lone person in straightened circumstances, who let rooms to respectable parties on reasonable terms." He

continued to lodge with Mrs. Tully in Gillingham Row long after he entered the law-office of Mandamus, Writ & Co., and early and late the young student might be seen bending over his books in Mrs. Tully's fourth floor, back, as oblivious of his dingy surroundings as he was of the hurry and turmoil of the great city's ever-changing multitudes. He had no company and few friends. He was too poor to waste his time in frivolous pleasures, even had he a taste for the brilliant nothings of society. He meant to be successful, and successful he would be if hard study, self-denial, and some talent count for anything in the race to wealth and fame.

Occupying a room in the attic was Mrs. Brandon and her daughter Agnes. Mrs. Brandon's husband had been a railroad engineer, and during his lifetime made a comfortable living for his little family. But, one day, there was a terrible collision — a misplaced switch, a freight train where it ought not to have been — and John Brandon was brought home to his wife and child a crushed and bleeding mass of shapeless humanity.

After the funeral Mrs. Brandon removed to Gillingham Row, and became the occupant of Mrs. Tully's third floor, front. But her slender hoard of money soon gave out, and, as grim-visaged poverty advanced his frowning front, she retreated step by step and finally reached the attic, the poorest of Mrs. Tully's poor but highly respectable lodgers. One by one treasured articles of furniture went for bread, until there was nothing left of value in the small, forlorn, old attic. The widow, everybody said, had a hard time of it, but for her child's sake she struggled bravely with her poverty, and toiled from morning till night, thankful for the pittance earned and the poor roof that sheltered her and her little one. She took in washing, plain sewing, or anything, in fact, which would enable her to keep the wolf from the door.

Agnes was now fifteen and gave promise of great beauty. That golden head of hers caused many of the first floor lodgers to turn and look after her as she tripped up the long flight of dark, narrow stairs, for the feet were small and active, and youth made them light and happy in spite of poverty. Besides being remarkably beautiful, Agnes possessed a wonderfully sweet voice, and to hear it one would think a nightingale were imprisoned in the attic, and would sing, though it warbled its heart out to damaged clothes-lines and sooty chimney tops. Among those who the most frequently saw her exquisite

face and heard her melodious voice was Maurice Ware. A young law-student in the fourth floor, back, could easily hear a girl singing in the attic, and it is not strange if he occasionally paused in his legal reading to listen, and to ponder more of Ovid than of Chitty. He met her, one evening, on the stairs carrying a large bundle. It might have been, Maurice shuddered to think of it, the weekly wash of some family living in the neighborhood; but he heroically mastered his disgust, and gallantly offered to carry the bundle for her. Agnes blushed and smiled, and, almost before she knew it, the heavy burden passed from her hands into his, and was carried in a trice to the attic-room and deposited at the feet of the astonished widow, who could but wonder that so fine a gentleman would trouble himself to help Agnes bring up Mrs. Milligan's wash. It was a very kindly and civil act, no doubt, but it is not at all likely that Maurice Ware would have offered his services so readily had the bundle-bearer been old and ugly, or a stout, middle-aged woman in indigent circumstances, like Mrs. Tully. But here was a girl in the first bloom of youth, with hair like spun gold clustering around a brow as white as snow, a girl with eyes as blue as meadow violets and a mouth as sweet as a rose. Although her dress was poor and made of cheap material, a queen might have envied Agnes her beauty and her smile of dimpled loveliness.

After this evening the girl began to live a new life and think new thoughts. Her education had been sadly neglected. She could read passably well by skipping the long words, but she could not write at all. Maurice offered to teach her, and the offer was gladly accepted. One may be a little hungry, — Agnes often was, — but if one has a friend whom they like very much, with a handsome, dark face and brilliant black eyes, they don't mind being hungry half so much as they otherwise would do. Agnes was learning more than to write, poor, foolish little heart! and the knowledge was deadly as the breath of the Upas.

Next door to the Brandon's lodged old Paglioni, a lame Italian street musician, — a queer, crack-brained old fellow, who had been a teacher of music in his native land, and crossed the sea "for reasons," as he said, but what those reasons were no mortal on this side of the Atlantic ever knew.

The bare walls of his garret contained only a stool, one dilapidated chair without a back, a rickety piece of furniture that he called a bed,

an old key-stained cabinet piano, and a violin. The violin was his daily companion in the streets, the piano was his solace at home.

The first time this odd old Paglioni heard Agnes singing, he started up and listened, eager and breathless, with surprise and pleasure.

"Ah! zat is ze voice, zat is ze music! Zar is gold in every note." Thus muttering delightedly to himself he limped to the widow's door, and greatly surprised her by the startlingly abrupt question, spoken in Paglioni's broken English:

"Vhy do you zit here and starve, Signora, ven you have gold and diamonds, and treasures untold, hidden avay in zis little bits of room?"

"I gold hidden away?" cried Mrs. Brandon, in amazement.

"Si, hidden avay in your daughter's throat. Educate her, and you vill have gold—plenty of gold. I vas a great mastero. I vas a teacher in ze grand conservatory at Milan. I know a voice zat has gold in it. I vill teach her, and ve vill be rich," replied the old Italian, rubbing his lean, yellow hands together gleefully. "She shall come to me every day, and you shall come vith her, and ve vill have ze music lesson and ze singing lesson, and by and by ve vill have ze gold."

Agnes's beauty was nothing to Paglioni. It was her voice that charmed him, and it was speedily arranged that old Paglioni should teach the girl music, so that some day she might turn her superb voice into gold, as the old musician had enthusiastically said.

The studious lodger in the fourth floor, back, smiled queerly when he heard of the matter, and vaguely wondered if old Paglioni was really in earnest, and saw in simple, pretty Agnes Brandon the stuff of which successful prima donnas are made. For a year Agnes was Paglioni's pupil, and made such rapid progress in the art her quaint old teacher loved so well, that he was half wild with delight; but, to the unutterable sorrow and dismay of Agnes and her mother, the singing lessons came to a sudden and most untimely end, for one morning Paglioni was found dead in his bed, with his violin by his side, and across his shrunken face a sheet of music that had fallen from his hand when Death laid his chill finger upon him, and silently summoned him hence. The coroner's physician came, took a hasty view of the crooked old body, and without more ado hustled it off to the Potter's Field, and that was the last of Paglioni.

About this time Mrs. Brandon's health began to fail. Toil and privation made sad havoc of a frame always delicate, and grief and anxiety so preyed upon her that consumption set its fatal seal on the thin, wan features; and while it deepened the hue of her cheeks and heightened the brightness of her eyes, it stole away her strength, and the feeble step and hollow cough told but too plainly that her days were numbered.

From his own slender means Maurice contrived to spare enough to pay the widow's rent, and took such a kindly interest in the little, poverty-stricken family in the attic, that all the other lodgers were loud in his praise, and declared him to be the very best young man they had ever known.

One night, when she was very hungry and there was neither fire nor food in the garret, Agnes, driven desperate at the sight of her mother's pale face and white, wasted hands, caught up an old black silk hood from the only chair the garret contained, drew it over her face, and rushed blindly out into the street. But what could she do in all that heedless, hurrying crowd of people? Who would listen to her if she asked for help? How could she earn money enough to buy a loaf of bread? Ah, her voice! Necessity lent her courage. Shrinking within the friendly shadow of an awning, where there were many passers-by, she began to sing a little Italian air that Paglioni had taught her. An old gentleman passing by stopped, listened a moment, and generously threw her a few pennies. A lady, leading a little child by the hand, paused, smiled pleasantly, and gave the young singer a silver piece. Agnes, emboldened by her success, forgot to keep within the shadow of the awning, and a fellow, smelling vilely of brandy, and wearing a big diamond ring on his little finger, approached her and stared insolently in her face.

"You are not an Italian, my birdie; though you might be an angel, with such hair and eyes, and such a voice. What is your name? and where do you live? Oh, you are shy—new to the business, I see. There is a gold eagle for you, and my arm for a walk, beside, if you will."

The look in his eyes made her heart stand still and set her cheeks aflame. She pushed from her the hand that held forth the glittering bribe, and ran home as fast as her feet could carry her. Mrs. Brandon caught her sobbing daughter to her bosom, and, as she soothed her

fears and kissed away her tears, charged her never, never to venture the like again.

"But I did it for you, for you, mamma. I could not bear to see you ill and without food. The old gentleman, and the lady with the little child, gave me all this," putting the money in her mother's hand; "and I did not think any one would look at me so."

"We will starve together, my darling, if starve we must. You are too young to venture out alone, and your face, my poor child, is not one to expose in the streets of a great, wicked city."

"Ah, that is it. He offered me the money for my face and not for my singing, and he followed me, oh, ever so far; and I was so frightened."

When Mr. Ware came to hear of Agnes's experience as a street-singer, his eyes grew very grave.

"You must never do it again, never, Agnes. There are bad, idle men everywhere, and harm would come to you, sooner or later, if you were to continue it. Promise me you will do so no more. I am poor myself, but I will gladly share with you the little I have rather than have you run such a risk."

Agnes gave the promise then and there, and never sang in the streets again. Was there ever a man so generous and noble as Maurice Ware? The girl could not adore him enough. And Mrs. Brandon was quite as much overcome by his goodness as was her daughter. He completely won the confidence of both, and they saw in him the very perfection of manly truth and generosity.

One dreary November day Mrs. Brandon quietly laid herself down and died, imploring Maurice with her latest breath to be a brother to her orphan daughter, and to comfort her when she was gone. This Maurice solemnly promised to do, and the widow died believing in and trusting him to the last. It was Mr. Ware who took the weeping girl from the bosom of her dead mother, and hushed her to sleep in his arms as one might a sorrowing child. He saw the mother decently buried, and engaged Mrs. Tully to look after the girl while her grief was yet new and her young heart aching.

Mrs. Tully, for her part, said it was the most fortunate thing in the world that Agnes had so good a friend as the quiet, unpretending young lawyer of the fourth floor, back, to take an interest in her. But for him, she did not know what would ever become of the child. Agnes

continued to live in the attic after her mother's death; it was all the home she had, poor as it was, and supported herself by "finishing off waists" at Madam Doolie's fashionable dress-making establishment in Great Chelsea Street. Maurice, being such an exemplary young man, and enjoying the utmost confidence of the circumspect Mrs. Tully,—said confidence being strengthened from time to time by divers small moneyed considerations, judiciously presented when the landlady was known to be behindhand with her rent,—enabled Mr. Ware to visit the attic much oftener than was good for the peace of mind of its solitary occupant. To Agnes these visits were glimpses of heaven, and she looked forward to them as her one little bright spot in the long, lonely day.

"You are so good, so good," she said one evening, looking up in his face with a world of worshipping love in her sea-blue eyes. "I can't begin to tell you how grateful I am. You were so kind to mamma, poor mamma! I shall always love you for that, whatever happens."

"Always, Agnes? Are you quite sure?"

"Quite sure; for being kind to mamma and to me, and teaching me to write, why, I'd be very wicked if I did not love you."

He smoothed her sunny hair, and smiled down into the loving eyes that never dreamed of danger or saw for a moment whither it was he was leading her. It was the old, old, sad old story. He could not marry her then. He was too poor, and his studies not yet completed, but by-and-by, when he had obtained a foothold in the world, she should be his wife. Possibly Maurice Ware believed in himself at the time, and really meant to make good his promise. He had a man's passion for the girl, and he gratified it without a single misgiving of conscience. He loved her after a fashion compatible with his selfish nature; but the love he heartlessly disowned when the time came for him to abandon the old life and launch out into the new, because it stood in the way of his ambition and retarded him in his race to greatness. He meant to be a man among men, and his wife must be a well-born and well-educated woman, who would add to, not detract from, his individual dignity.

Men seldom marry whom they love. They plod along the matrimonial road in double harness at a steady, humdrum pace, apparently contented, but the harness galls in many places, and if they sometimes grow restive and unmanageable, they are soon made to feel the curb

and settle down again to the old jog-trot gait.

For a year and a half Agnes dwelt in her fool's paradise; then came the awakening, and whatsoever woman awakes from the dream she had dreamed, awakens to drink of the waters of Marah.

Wilfred Graham, also a law-student in the office of Mandamus, Writ & Co., invited Maurice to spend his vacation with him at Cedarcroft, near Somerton, the elegant country-seat of his father.

Wilfred was a large-hearted, whole-souled young fellow, and wrote to his sister the following glowing account of Maurice and his many good qualities. A rather disjointed, harum-scarum sort of an epistle, but quite characteristic of the eldest-born of the Grahams:

DEAR SIS.—Ware is an excellent fellow! Talented and full of go. He is as poor as a church mouse; but that's nothing. I'd never have pulled through but for him, and, as we are admitted now, full fledged and rising lights of the bar, I just thought I'd do the handsome by him, and ask him down to Cedarcroft. He is not a bit of a gallant, so you must not build a romance upon his coming. Staid as bricks, does n't go anywhere, lodges in a fourth floor, back, with a Mrs. Tully, who has a mole on her chin. Does not love anything nor anybody but law and himself, but he is a tip-top fellow, for all that. Got lots of brains, does n't smoke, awful moral; can't afford to be anything else, he says. Will be down the day after to-morrow.

WILFRED.

Coming as the guest of Wilfred Graham, every house in Somerton was open to Maurice Ware. Marguerite met him at a garden party given in his honor at Cedarcroft, and admired him from the first. In many ways he pleased her. There was a certain forcefulness about him that won her regard, and made her think of him as she never before had thought of any one. She despised the drawling idiocy of the conventional man of fashion, the ball-room exquisite, the pretty, perfumed society darlings, who played lawn tennis and criticised women as if they were horses. Maurice was not of this sort. You would know him anywhere for a man of fixed purposes, inflexible will, and indomitable courage. From boyhood he had fought hand to hand with poverty, and met and overcome obstacle after obstacle in his march towards success. He denied himself to-day that he might enjoy to-morrow, and in all his plans of life made love a secondary matter, as he had hitherto made it a pastime and a pleasure.

He soon saw that Marguerite could greatly advance his fortunes, and he determined to marry her if possible. With an eye like an eagle and dark as night, the form of a Hercules, and the step and bearing of a thorough gentleman, he might be pardoned the thought that the winning of Marguerite would be no difficult task. She was an only daughter and an heiress in a moderate way; more than this, and which was of vastly more importance to young Ware, she was the niece of old Judge Van Cleaf, the ablest jurist in the West, and at the present time Chief Justice of his native State.

Maurice Ware argued that all he wanted was an opportunity, and here it was ready awaiting his acceptance. Marguerite would be his stepping-stone to power, the ladder by which he might easily rise to honorable distinction among the most prominent men of the day.

Judge Van Cleaf, as everybody knew, was extremely fond of Marguerite, and would, of course, look with a favorable eye on her husband, who, if not rich, was of good family, and had within himself the true elements of future wealth. So he paid court to Marguerite like a lover bent upon winning the lady of his choice, utterly unmindful of poor Agnes, alone in the bare, dreary attic, waiting for letters that never were written, and the sound of footsteps that never came. Day after day past, and still he lingered at Somerton. Oh, the heart-sickening anguish of waiting and hoping and doubting only to wait, and hope, and doubt again, until the disappointment is greater than one can bear! Forsaken! no, he could not be so cruel. He would come to-morrow or by the next day at most. He was only a little forgetful; he did not know how dreadfully lonely she was. She tried, poor girl, to cheat her fears and reason away her doubts, but the pain was there, and her heavy eyes told of sleepless nights and weary, anxious days. The truth came at last. Mrs. Tully mounted to the attic in hot haste to tell Agnes the wonderful news. It was nearly dark, and the one little window lighted but dimly the poor apartment where the girl sat finishing off a cashmere waist, and making the most of the little remaining daylight.

"Just as I expected, when he stayed away so long," began Mrs. Tully, breathless from her unwonted haste; "just as I expected—you lose your friend and I my lodger."

Agnes dropped the waist, and looked at her in wide-eyed alarm.

"I lose my friend! Not—not Maurice?"

"Yes. Mr. Ware is going to be married, and soon, too, I take it, since he has given up the fourth floor, back."

"Married!"

It was fortunate for Agnes that the room was so dark, otherwise the deathly pallor of her face would never have escaped the keen notice of Mrs. Tully. "Married to whom?"

"To a beautiful Somerton lady, rich and accomplished, and everything that is nice and good. Here is a letter for you, it came with mine. I dare say it will tell you all about it. You were such friends; oh, you will miss him, dear, and so shall I, for it will be many a day before I get such another quiet, agreeable lodger in the fourth floor, back."

"Where is Somerton?" the white lips asked, very faintly.

"Oh, a long way from this,—more than four hundred miles."

"But where?"

"Why in Pennsylvania, among the mountains somewhere. A beautiful place. I heard Mr. Graham talking about it. You know he came to see Mr. Ware sometimes. Cedarcroft, that's the name of his father's place."

"And the lady is rich and — and beautiful?"

"Yes, of course."

"Who told you so?"

"Who told me so? Why, you stupid child, don't you know Maurice Ware well enough to know that if she were *not* rich and beautiful he would not marry her, nor any woman."

Agnes winced, every word was like a dagger-thrust to her.

"I never thought he cared for money, and I am beau—What did you say was the lady's name?"

"I did not say it was anything, for I never heard it. Here is your letter; don't spoil your eyes trying to read it by this poor light."

Mrs. Tully put the letter in her hand, said good-night in a chirpy tone, and trotted down-stairs again, leaving the girl alone with her misery. Oh, if she could but die, and be rid of the heartache and the shame. Whatever it might be to him, it was shame to her, deadly, ineffable, ineffaceable shame. She knew it now by its proper name, and shrank back appalled before the dreadful something that seemed to be freezing her very heart and slowly turning her into stone. She opened the letter with fingers that shook like an aspen leaf and were as cold as ice. It was brief, to the point, and without date or signature. It enclosed a bank-

note of considerable amount, accompanied with the curt statement that it was the last remittance she need ever expect from him. He had formed other plans in life since he saw her last, and would not return to Gillingham Row; advised her to forget him, as she was now old enough to view the past in its true light. He had no desire to give her pain, but his circumstances had materially changed of late, and any communication from her in the future would be regarded as an annoyance, and treated accordingly.

Alas, for you, Agnes! The letter dropped from her hand, and she fell like one struck dead prone to the floor. The one low cry that escaped her pale lips died away in the dusky solitude of the dismal garret, the golden hair that veiled her despair-stricken face was the single gleam of brightness in that desolate room. For hours she lay there alone, with only the pitying eyes of the angels to witness her misery.

The sun was shining brightly when she awoke to consciousness and stared around her in mute bewilderment. Miss Peabody's cashmere waist lay on the floor, and beside it the cruel letter. She picked it up and put it in her bosom, with a numb, dead feeling at her heart, and a yearning wish to see Maurice once more.

Somerton! Why might she not go to Somerton?

She arose, put on her bonnet and shawl, and stole down-stairs without meeting any one. Once clear of Gillingham Row, she hastened her steps, and never stopped until she reached the great noisy depot. "A ticket to Somerton, if you please," she said, timidly, to the trim and prodigiously-whiskered agent at the little window.

That magnificent being eyed her suspiciously. "A ticket to Somerton, Miss, will be, first-class, ten dollars."

Agnes could not pay so much. "How far will seven dollars take me?"

"Seven dollars will take you to Glencoe; Somerton is sixty-three miles beyond. Will you have a ticket to Glencoe?"

"If you please." Agnes handed him the money, received the ticket, and in twenty minutes was on her way to Somerton.

It was barely daylight when she left the cars at Glencoe. She bought a loaf of bread and sat down in the gloomy little depot to eat it. The watchman stared at her, and wondered what such a slip of a girl was doing there alone

at that hour. From Glencoe she begged her way to Somerton. Her money was all gone; but no one denied her food when she asked for it at any of the hospitable farm-houses she passed, and she slept at night out under the stars, like the flowers and the birds. Foot-sore and weary, she at last saw the blue waters of the Juniata winding along at the base of the Somerton hills. The kind old farmer who set her down at the cross-roads, after giving her a ten miles' lift, said he hoped she would find the folks she had come to see well, and drove on, leaving her there the forlornest of all forlorn objects. The loquacious laborer's wife, who lived in the little house near the cross-roads, came out and asked her if she'd not have a bit to eat, and rest awhile, "for she looked aweary, poor thing." Agnes was faint from hunger and fatigue, and gladly accepted of the kind-hearted woman's homely hospitality. Did she know of any one in Somerton called Maurice Ware?

"Aye, that she did; for was not the young city lawyer to marry Marguerite Van Cleaf tomorrow?"

"To-morrow!" Agnes started. "And the lady is rich and beautiful?"

"Well, no, not beautiful; but she is well-to-do, and thought so much of. That's her home, the pretty white villa you see down there among the maples."

Agnes thanked the woman, and turned away with the great tears trembling on her long golden lashes and her heart lying like lead in her bosom. Marguerite's home! She looked at it first through blinding tears; and that and many days thereafter she thought of it as a quiet place wherein to die. There, surely, a sorrowing heart might forget its sorrow and hush itself into eternal rest.

She longed to see Marguerite, longed to see the one who had taken from her her lover and made her life a desolate waste. Once she ventured near the kitchen-door, with a faint hope of seeing Marguerite somewhere about the grounds, but Bruno's menacing growl frightened her away, and she went and hid herself in the hazel thicket near the old hawthorn, to wait for darkness and Maurice. Lulled by the low murmur of the river she fell asleep, and did not awaken until almost sunset. Between herself and the hawthorn she saw a girl slowly walking along the grassy path. Agnes forgot her weariness, and gazed with her soul in her eyes, for something told her the girl was Marguerite. A feeling of pity and respect took possession of

her. Perhaps it was because she saw, simple as she was, that Marguerite was only a girl like herself, with a heart to break and love to be wasted, if she trusted either to the keeping of Maurice Ware.

Marguerite went on her way, quite unconscious of the crouching figure hidden in the hazel copse not three feet from her, and when she had disappeared within the house, Agnes cautiously left her place of concealment and gained the shelter of the pines, where she waited the coming of her faithless lover.

Agnes left him disenchanted; his slave no longer, simply his victim. In that passionate outburst of bitter renunciation she had thrown off his yoke forever, and it only remained for her to die as quickly and as painlessly as she could.

If the exact truth were to be told, no doubt Maurice Ware was no better, nor no worse, than most young men whom one meets every day, and who eventually settle down and become excellent husbands and fathers,—men who have dark memories of past indiscretions stowed away in the innermost recesses of their consciences of fair, foolish creatures, whose youth and weaknesses were the lotus blossoms under which the serpent, guileful as that which tempted Eve, hid his glistening coils—creatures who, somehow, frail as they were, made a part of their lives at a period when thoughtless young fellows are prone to be as prodigal of their promises as they are of their affections.

When a woman falls, she falls as low as Lucifer. Men find no difficulty in regaining respectability for a like offence, though their sin be "worn as bold and open as a smile." No doors are shut against them; no hand refuses them friendship; no heads are turned scornfully aside, but let a woman once wear the scarlet letter, and every man's hand, certainly every woman's, is henceforth and forever raised high in condemnation. There is no forgiveness for her, no atonement. She is a thing to be shunned, like the leper whose disease is incurable and whose presence contagious. Hagar is driven forth into the wilderness to die of hunger and thirst, while Abraham is blest, and grows rich in flocks and lands, and becomes a patriarch and a lawgiver among his people. Cæsar may have as many *liaisons* as he likes, but the chastity of Cæsar's wife must be above suspicion. It is the world's unjust judgment on all erring womankind, and is as old as the creation, as fixed as the polestar, and so will continue to be till the end of time.

CHAPTER III.

Few—none—find what they love or could have loved,
 Though accident, blind contact, and the strong
 Necessity of loving have removed
 Antipathies, but to recur, ere long,
 Envenom'd with irrevocable wrong.—BYRON.

MARGUERITE'S wedding day dawned clear and bright, and not a single cloud was in view to mar the perfect sunshine of the balmy spring morning.

"Thank heaven for a clear sky," gratefully exclaimed old Jeannette, as she took a weather-wise survey of the eastern horizon just as the sun began to peep above the hills. "A May marriage is bad enough, in all conscience; but to have it rain, too, there'd be no luck for any one."

It was a very simple bridal party that walked up the centre aisle of the little village church and took their places before the altar. Maurice cast a single searching glance over the craning heads of the assembled villagers, who had packed themselves in the gallery and near the doorways as closely as humanity can pack itself and breathe. He gave a long sigh of relief. Agnes was not there. One never knows what mad freak may seize a jealous woman. Had the girl attempted a scene, he was fully prepared to denounce her as being a poor, crazy unfortunate, who had gone wrong through no instrumentality of his. But Agnes was not there, so the marriage ceremony went on according to the impressive rites of the Episcopal Church, and nothing unusual occurred to interrupt its solemnity, or detract from its holy obligations.

The party drove back to The Maples. Congratulations, a collation, and leave-taking followed; then the young wife followed her husband to the carriage, the newly-married pair were driven directly to the railway station, and, with many good wishes and tender farewells, started on their long journey to their Western home. Jeannette stood in the doorway and watched the carriage disappear beyond the pines, with the look in her eyes of a faithful dog that has been forbidden to follow its master. Marguerite was gone, gone from the old home and the dear familiar faces. Gone away to the new, the untried, the care-fraught future that awaited her, and held, she knew not what, of sorrow, disappointment, and trouble.

Mr. Ware had not calculated wrongly in one respect. Marguerite's uncle was really pleased with him, and did all he could to advance the

young lawyer's interests, and place him on the high road to fame and fortune.

The young wife adapted herself readily to her new duties and new surroundings, and if their home was not luxurious, it was comfortable, and replete with refinement, good taste, and good order. Marguerite had no wish to shine beyond the limit of her own hearth-stone, and to make her husband happy and his home pleasant was the chief aim of all her earthly desires.

Mr. Ware gave himself up body and soul to business. Prosperity attended his efforts, and wealth began to flow in like a stream that, having made headway against manifold obstructions, cannot, when it has once gathered force and volume, be easily turned from its course. Men spoke of him with respect, and listened to him with reverence. His opinions were quoted by learned jurists, his arguments were never without weight, and never lacked attentive hearers. He had many devoted adherents and admiring friends who predicted that he would one day wear the robe of a Chief Justice, and sit among the mightiest of the land. He was fond of Marguerite in a reserved, undemonstrative way, but he soon saw that "if a man would have fine guests he must have a fine wife," and this he could never hope for in Marguerite. If she felt hurt at times by his indirect allusions to her plainness or lack of social vivacity, she wisely let it pass unnoticed, for she was a sensible woman, and a loving and unselfish one, who would much rather see a fault in herself than discover one in her husband. True, she was disappointed, disappointed in many ways. She missed certain elements of congeniality and reciprocity of feeling between herself and husband that, try as she would, she could not altogether reason away. Marguerite did not think herself unloved, or, correctly speaking, neglected. It had not come to that yet, but she often regretted, solely for his sake, that she was not handsome, that she had no fine accomplishments, and knew no arts whereby to enslave and hold captive the hearts and minds of others.

Very soon after her marriage, Marguerite was made to understand that her husband had very little sympathy with the strong attachment she had always expressed for her father and her old home. The "little brown wren that chirped about The Maples" was one thing, Mr. Ware's wife was another, as he took early occasion to remind her in language more forcible than polite. He did not like Somerton, an isolated, dead-and-alive little town perched on the side

of a mountain. He hated the very name of the pines. Mr. Van Cleaf ought not to expect his daughter to sacrifice herself, because he happened to have rheumatism or something of the sort. Marguerite was childish and unreasonable to be always bothering about the old gentleman and his ailments. Was there not Jeannette to look after his wants, and what more did he need?

These sharp rebukes became so frequent that Marguerite, in order to avoid their unpleasant repetition, rarely mentioned her father's name, much less did she speak of her old home, and the happy life she had led at The Maples; but, oh, how she longed for a sight of the dear old hills, to hear the murmur of the Juniata, to feel her father's kiss on her forehead, and to tell him how tired, how very tired, she was of the weary, pushing, striving, struggling world, where every one seemed trying to get the better of his neighbor, and none were really happy or contented.

She never ventured to question her husband's out-goings or in-comings, and knew no more of the inner workings of his thoughts and purposes than did the veriest stranger he passed in the streets. He never volunteered her any information touching his business relations, and she never was the woman to ask a confidence not voluntarily given. In time maternity came with its new well-springs of affection, and in the wonder of the young life that slipped away from heaven one day, when the gates were left ajar, to nestle in her arms, and grow strong and beautiful in the light of her loving eyes, she forgot the inward unrest that troubled her more than she dare admit even to her own heart.

Marguerite's motherhood, like her marriage, fell in the luckless month of May, infinitely to Jeannette's regret. But Marguerite's baby boy seemed a part of the gladsome spring-time, and in writing to her old nurse, the proud mother, speaking of the infant marvel, had said that May had given her, at least, one royal blessing, and Jeannette must never quarrel with that particular month again. Then she gave a careful account of baby's silken wisps of hair, his tiny hands, and hazel eyes; yes, she was sure they were hazel; and his name was to be Richard, her own dear father's name; and he was so sweet and pretty, Jeannette would be certain to love him, because no one could help doing so who had any heart at all. But this ecstatic joy, this new found delight, was only given Marguerite for a little while. The baby died—

died suddenly of scarlet-fever when it was just one year and five days old. Marguerite returned to Somerton, for the first time since she left it a bride two years before, to lay her baby beside her mother up there on the daisied hillside, where the sentinel firs kept their solemn watch, and where no pain or suffering could ever reach her darling more.

Jeannette met her at the door, and led her to the cool, quiet chamber which had been Marguerite's in her girlhood, and where she now came looking but the ghost of her former self. Her black dress and pale face told their own sad story, and a something more that was sadder far than tears.

Jeannette tried to comfort her, but Marguerite could see nothing but the tiny white casket that held her heart, nothing but the little waxen features and snow-drop hands lying wan and still in that narrow cradle where no lullaby was needed to sing it to rest.

Mr. Ware could not remain away from his business longer than three days, he said, not even to bury his child, and at the expiration of that time, in compliance with his wishes, Marguerite bade her father a sobbing farewell, and returned to her desolate home, feeling very old and strangely unlike herself.

He regretted his child's death, of course, but it could not be helped. It was one of those afflictions that must be borne, and Marguerite, conscious that her husband could not feel as she did, that the bereavement was not to him what it was to her, kept her grief to herself.

"How my dear young lady is changed," thought Jeannette, the day of Marguerite's departure, taking, with her afternoon nap, a retrospective view of the past two years. "Only twenty last April, and such a worn, disappointed, unsatisfied look as she has. It's not natural at her age, at least it ought n't to be. A high and mighty lawyer he may be, and smart and handsome, but Mr. Ware is not the man to make any woman happy. A walking piece of ice, and what ain't ice is law. I am sure *I* am not the one to wish him to remain at The Maples."

As for Marguerite, the pain at her heart grew keener every day. Maurice became more pronounced in his "fault-finding," as Jeannette would have termed his irritating criticism of Marguerite's dress and Marguerite's manners. True, she was in deep mourning, but a woman, even in mourning, can, if she tries, at least make herself interesting.

Mr. Ware went out a great deal and saw a great deal of fine company. He was a favorite everywhere, and his ambition grew with his popularity. He turned his eyes towards politics. Fatal infatuation! The Senate was now his aim, and to reach its coveted honors he bent all his energy of will and power of thought. His fine address, polished manners, clear, logical mind and acknowledged abilities won him many friends. Stern old Judge Van Cleaf was exceedingly proud of his nephew-in-law, and often complimented his niece on the wisdom she had displayed in her choice of a husband. Marguerite said nothing, however. "Many people," remarks Longfellow, "mistake buttercups in the grass for immensurable gold mines under the ground," and she felt in her inmost consciousness that there was no gold beneath the surface of Maurice Ware's hard, unsympathetic nature, only buttercups in the grass, and nothing beneath worth mining for. Ladies generally esteemed Mr. Ware a very superior person, and thought it "really too odd for anything" that he should ever fancy that plain, dowdyish wife of his, who was all eyes and forehead, and no more suited to him than a hedge-sparrow is fit to mate with an eagle. They did not know, simple souls, that Marguerite, plain as they thought her, was the Aladdin's lamp which had lighted the magnificent Maurice on his way to fortune, and that she was as infinitely above him as the heavens are above the earth. Hers was the true genius, the true power, the true strength, which would live and grow and endure long after Maurice Ware's brilliant but ephemeral talents had burnt itself out, and lay a heap of white ashes at his feet.

Neglect, and indifference she could bear patiently, and find an excuse for, but a positive injury she would not suffer from any one. Mr. Ware had this yet to learn, and the knowledge came only too soon for his future well-being.

Nearly a year had passed since little Richard's death, and Marguerite had grown familiar with her grief, when a most unexpected event occurred, which shattered at a blow her domestic peace, and opened a gulf between herself and husband that never in this world could be bridged.

While at breakfast, one morning, and, as the Fates would have it, the month was May, the servant entered the room and handed Mr. Ware a telegram.

"If you please, the boy is waiting outside, and says is there any answer."

Mr. Ware tore open the envelope and hastily

ran his eyes over the dispatch. His cheek flushed, and he cast a swift glance towards his wife, who sat quietly pouring the coffee at the other end of the table.

"Tell the boy there is no answer." Having dismissed the servant, he turned to Marguerite, "A business engagement of importance calls me at once to Richmond. I shall probably be absent a week. I'll not be home to dinner. Please have my portmanteau ready in an hour, and I'll send the office boy around for it."

He arose, went out into the hall, took his hat and gloves, and, as he was putting on the latter, came back and kissed his wife in a most business-like way. "Good-by; I'll be back in a week at most. There will be no occasion to write."

Marguerite followed him to the door. "Is not this very sudden, Maurice? Must you really go to-day?"

"I really must. A very complicated law case; nothing that would interest you, though."

She put her hand persuasively on his arm. "Perhaps I might be interested, if you cared to tell me. I cannot tell why, but I dislike the thought of your going away to-day. Jeannette has made me a little superstitious, I think, for I have come to have a decided dread of May. Baby died, you know, in May, and we were married—" she checked herself, and added, after a moment's silence, "and now you are going on this sudden journey while our evil star is in the ascendant."

"Nonsense. Jeannette is an old croaker. You should be above such silly fears."

Her hand fell from his arm, and he left her standing there in the hall doorway, looking after him with very thoughtful eyes. But not the remotest suspicion crossed her mind that he had not told her the truth. Mr. Ware was always having business engagements of one kind or another, of the nature of which she knew absolutely nothing.

The third day of her husband's absence she received a letter from Jeannette. It contained many dolorous allusions to May, and, what troubled Marguerite far more, a palpable hint that Mr. Van Cleaf was far from well, and she feared he fretted after his daughter more than was good for him in his feeble state of health.

The letter filled Marguerite with alarm. Her father ill, and she not there to care for him? She was just debating in her mind whether it was not her duty to go immediately

to Somerton, when Rachel, the trusted maid of all work, interrupted her train of thought by handing her a thin, glazy card on which was printed the name of Beriah Coke.

"A gentleman as says he wishes to see Mrs. Ware," explained Rachel, tersely.

"A gentleman to see me? Beriah Coke! I do not know any such person," reading the name from the card in a wondering tone. "Perhaps it is Mr. Ware he wishes to see?"

"He said *Mrs.* Ware quite plainly, and that his business was confidential and important."

Marguerite descended to the parlor, a little curious as to what the stranger's "confidential and important" business could be.

A small man, with ferret-like eyes, a receding mouth, and rusty black hair, arose as she entered the room and bowed to the floor.

"Mrs. Ware, I believe?"

"Yes; and you are," referring to the card, "Mr. Beriah Coke?"

"The same, and most humbly at your service."

"Your business, if you please. I think you stated it to be important."

"Exactly; important *and* private. I may say delicate." He coughed behind his hand, and tried to look embarrassed. "I need not say to a lady of your superior intelligence that, ahem, husbands, even the best of them, are prone to wander from their marital obligations."

"Sir!"

"Your most humble pardon. Now, I dare say you think your husband in Boston or New York, or some other remote city, at this present moment."

"Mr. Ware is at Richmond."

"You are mistaken. Mr. Ware has not been a mile from his own door since you saw him last. A clever trick—fooled you handsomely. Oh, but he is a deep one, is lawyer Ware."

"What do you mean?" demanded Marguerite, the indignant blood mounting hotly to her brow.

"Business, purely business. I am, so to speak, a sort of triumvirate as regards the government of my actions. I am a creature of circumstances—part detective, part Bohemian, part lecturer. I have seen a great many ups and downs in my time. I am down now financially, as you may perceive, were you so kind as to note the shabby appearance of this article of dress," pointing, as he spoke, to the discreditable looking old silk hat, very much

the worse for wear, which he held in his hand with the air of a Chesterfield.

"And why do you come to me? What can I do for you?" questioned Marguerite, regarding the man with a look of mingled distrust and interest.

"Well, you see," and the creature grinned horribly, "there is a lady in the case. A veiled lady. Tall, fine shoulders, and carries herself like a princess."

"Silence, sir!" with an imperious uplifting of her noble head. "True or false, how dare you bring so vile a tale to me?"

"Business, simply business. It might be worth your while to pay me a fair—"

"Pay you! What? to dog my husband's footsteps, to play the spy upon him, to—to—You mistake me, sir; I have no occasion for *your* services."

"Then you do not care? These little conjugal irregularities of your husband are mere trifles, such as a wife is not supposed to take any notice of."

The cool effrontery of the fellow for a moment rendered her speechless.

"How do I know that you speak the truth?"

Marguerite's gray eyes were searching his very soul, and he must be a good liar that could deceive her more than once.

The narrow-browed, weasel-featured type of all that was mean and contemptible never so much as blushed. He took a neatly folded paper from his coat-pocket, opened it with assured deliberation, and, with a kind of cringing triumph, held it towards her.

"I have here the proof of what I say."

Marguerite would not touch the paper, and Mr. Coke was obliged to read aloud its contents, if he would convince her of the truth of his statement.

MEM.—May 25. M. W. Lady tall—wore a blue veil—elegantly dressed—amethyst ring on third finger of left hand, with initial *V* set in diamonds. Met her at depot 2.15. Close carriage. Drove to Grand Hotel. Dined at Morceau's at four o'clock.

"Are you now satisfied that I speak the truth?"

Mr. Beriah Coke folded the paper with an injured air and replaced it in his pocket.

"How came you by this knowledge, and what motive had you for taking so much trouble to find out that which in no way concerned you?"

"I came by my knowledge strictly in the way of business, and my motive—I wonder that you ask—is simply—*money*."

For reply, Marguerite pulled the bell and summoned a servant.

"Felix, show this person out."

And almost before he knew it, Mr. Coke found himself in the street, a very much amazed and discomfited triumvirate.

"You play it finely, my proud lady; but I'll wager my head that you will be at Morceau's to-morrow at four o'clock, sharp," muttered the ill-used man of three professions as he turned on his heel and quickly disappeared.

How Marguerite spent that night she never knew. It was all like a confused dream — disjointed, horrible, unreal — yet a sickening conviction, away down in the depths of her heart, told her that Mr. Coke — spy, detective, black-mailer, whatever he might be — had spoken the truth. She would not go to Morceau's. Marguerite Van Cleaf would never lower herself like that. What were a shameless woman's acts to her? But Mr. Ware was her husband. Had she not a right to know, to see with her own eyes and to hear with her own ears? Marguerite's self-questionings ended, as Mr. Coke shrewdly predicted they would, in her putting on her bonnet and going to Morceau's. Twice she wavered in her purpose, twice she turned back, resolved to rise above so poor a doubt, a suspicion coming from so despicable a source, but the great, overmastering desire to "know for certain" as many times urged her on.

Morceau's was a highly respectable place. Only the wealthy could afford to patronize so costly and elaborately appointed a *menu*, where the choicest viands were served on the finest china by waiters who, were they seen anywhere else than at Morceau's, might easily be mistaken for younger sons of noble houses.

Marguerite had never been there before, and, in her black bonnet and shawl and long black veil, she looked just what she was, a quiet, unassuming woman, who desired nothing more than a plate of soup, any kind, it did not matter, and a seat in an out of the way corner where her back would be towards the door, and her pale face not likely to attract the notice of those coming in or those going out.

The soup might have been ambrosia for all Marguerite knew to the contrary, for, just as the waiter placed it before her, a voice she knew but too well said,—

"We are a little early, Leon; but we hope to be served all the better for it."

Leon bowed obsequiously, with his hand on his heart.

"Monsieur and Madame shall be served with the best."

It was plainly evident that the distressingly polite servitor esteemed the gentleman and lady very grand people, indeed, and that to serve them acceptably was to doubly serve Morceau.

Marguerite sat perfectly still. In that single moment of time Maurice Ware went out of her life as completely as if he had never been in it. Dethroned, discrowned, she cast him from her heart as one utterly beneath either her pity or contempt. As to forgiving him, that were impossible. It was one of those wrongs which cannot be forgiven or forgotten, and in an instant her resolution was taken.

She heard the rustle of a silken skirt, the low hum of conversation, a silly little, well-bred laugh. Her husband's voice tenderer far than she had heard it these many months; but she could not sit there forever, the very air seemed poisoned and foul with their presence. Marguerite arose, turned squarely around and looked her husband straight in the eyes. Not a word did she say, but her face was deadly pale, and her lips as rigid and colorless as marble. She passed them like a black shadow — the woman uttered a faint cry and hastily drew down her veil — and was gone before the bewildered Leon could well make out what it all meant.

Maurice Ware sat like one petrified.

"Marguerite!" he whispered through his pallid lips, stonily staring at the door through which she had vanished like a vision in a dream.

He could laugh at the helpless despair of Agnes, but the just anger of this insulted wife was something that even his stern, cold nature feared to confront. The most delicate morsel that Morceau ever served failed to tempt his appetite after that pale vision of Marguerite had disappeared. The siren at his side lavished her smiles in vain. The spell was broken. Maurice Ware, for the first time, felt and knew himself to be a false-hearted scoundrel.

At the street corner, not ten steps from Morceau's, stood Beriah Coke. He touched his hat with insolent familiarity as Marguerite passed him; yet, mean as he was, he dare not approach her with a view to "business" when her eyes looked like a wounded animal's at bay, and her teeth were set in lips as white as ashes.

Home she went as fast as her feet could carry her, and never paused for breath until she had reached her own room, turned the key in the door, and was alone. Thank God, alone! She

threw off her bonnet, bathed her face and hands, and then sat down to think.

Two, three, hours passed. Rachel's low rap on the door aroused her from as bitter a train of thought as ever stirred a woman's bosom. But she opened the door calmly enough, and asked kindly,—

"What is it you wish, Rachel?"

"If you please, Mr. Ware is come home, and wants to know if you will have tea served right away?"

"Tell Mr. Ware that I will see him in the library in half an hour."

Rachel's eyes expressed her astonishment, but, as it was her place to obey and not to ask questions, she went away to deliver the message precisely as her mistress had uttered it.

Mrs. Ware looked at herself in the glass with a queer, critical expression of countenance quite unusual to her. "So, I am plain—too plain, it seems, to suit his fastidious taste, his high ideas of beauty. I am not stylish nor brilliant. I can neither lie gracefully nor dress elegantly." A bitter smile finished the survey. She went down to her husband composed, determined, and with the step of an injured queen. If ever Maurice Ware had need of shrewd self-possession and consummate tact, he had need of it now. This was no weak, sobbing girl he had to deal with, but a strong, true woman, who hated falsehood and treachery as she did a venomous serpent or a poisonous weed. The main difficulty with him was he did not know just what course to pursue. In all human probability there would be a scene, and a very lively one, too. Were it not better, in view of this, to assume a bold front and pooh-pooh the matter off? But how the mischief came she to know? Had she suspected him, and, to round suspicion into certainty, had a watch set upon his actions? No. Marguerite would never do that. He finally made up his mind to be "conspicuously inexact," or, in other words, lie himself out of the awkward scrape he had gotten himself into, at any cost to his own self-respect and no regard whatever to the truth.

Marguerite bent her head slightly as she entered the room, in acknowledgment of her husband's rising, with most uncommon deference, to receive her, and then waited for him to speak.

"Why did you run away from Morceau's in such a strange and uncalled-for way?" he asked, with well-assumed unconcern. "I returned to town sooner than I expected, and happening to meet at the depot the wife of an

old friend, I was obliged, of course, to treat her civilly. You are not jealous, my dear? A mere act of politeness, I assure you."

This audacious falsehood called forth a look of ineffable contempt; but not a syllable did she utter in reply, and he went on, secretly wondering if he looked as foolish as he felt.

"I always thought you a sensible woman, but to be jealous, and make yourself so disagreeable, for no earthly reason, is rather ridiculous. Heavens, Marguerite, what is the good of being so obstinate? Do you not believe what I say?"

"No, not a word. The woman was a soulless, unprincipled creature; but, at her worst, eminently worthy of *your* friendship, Mr. Ware."

This nettled him in spite of the pacific *rôle* he had meant to play.

"The lady, I tell you, is an honored wife and mother. A lady of position, refinement, and education."

"The greater, then, her shame. Better for her husband and her children, aye, and her friends, that a millstone were hanged about her neck, and she be cast into the sea, than that she should live, disgraced, unclean, and dangerous, to soil honest names and blight honest homes. *I* cannot love, honor, and obey one whom *I do not* respect. Some women can, but I cannot; therefore, I leave you to your lady of fashion, position, and education, and go my way alone. For it is better, infinitely better, to walk alone all the days of one's life than to share existence with a thing like you."

"Woman, what do you mean?"

"Simply what I have said."

"Marguerite, are you mad? Do you know what the world will say?"

"I care not what the world may say. I know what my own conscience demands of me, and if the world condemn me, then let me stand condemned. You shall not make me your convenience. You shall not drag me down to your low level, for, though you were a king, I'd know you for a false, perjured wretch, not fit to touch an honest woman's hand, much less call an honest woman wife."

"This language I will not bear, even from you, Marguerite," replied Maurice, now really angry, and striding up and down the room like a caged lion.

"It is language you must bear, because you deserve it. But I have said all I have to say. The subject is one I am not likely to refer to again. Good-night." She left the room. He

heard the sweep of her skirts up the stairs, and then the stillness of death reigned in the house.

Maurice, in all his life, never felt so small and mean as he did at that moment. He might not love his wife, but he did value her respect, and would readily have given all he possessed on earth could he have recalled the miserable wrong-doing of the past four days.

Once again alone in her room, Marguerite securely bolted the door, and resolutely began to pack her trunks. Every article was folded neatly and with womanly care. Nothing was done hurriedly. She was very pale, and her hands trembled a little, but otherwise she was calm, serene-souled Marguerite facing her troubles bravely, and asking neither help nor pity of any one. She sat down before a drawer in her dressing-bureau that had not been opened for many months. It was full of beautiful little garments, so daintily fashioned that one might have thought them the handy-work of a fairy. Marguerite took them from the drawer and laid them one by one in her lap. She had made them when the little life was yet but a promise, so vaguely marvellous, and so altogether strange, that she herself could not fathom the depths of that mysterious love—a something that was, yet was not. She bowed her head over the downy white things. How good it was of God that He had taken her little one to himself. She did not think so yesterday, but, to-day—ah, that little grave on the hillside were a warmer and kinder resting-place than a father's bosom where so black a wrong existed. She shuddered, and the tears that had lain heavy at her heart all day overflowed her eyes, and dropped hot and fast on the pile of soft white laces and cambric.

The daylight crept dimly in at the windows. She had not closed her eyes the whole night. She heard her husband shut the front door, and, from the window, saw him walk, with a cloudy brow and hurried step, down the street. Then she went to her writing-desk, and wrote with a steady hand,—

Yesterday, I received a letter from Jeannette saying that my father was not at all well. I shall go to him immediately, and remain until he needs me no longer. MARGUERITE.

Rachel was absolutely dumb with amazement when her mistress came down stairs at eight o'clock dressed for a journey. She knew there had been a domestic difficulty of some kind, but had not dreamed of anything so serious as this.

Mrs. Ware was not disposed to be communicative, however, and merely stating that she was going to Somerton, ordered the carriage, leaving instructions to have her trunks sent after her by express, bade the old servant good-by, and was at once driven to the depot, leaving Rachel a prey to the most devouring curiosity.

Mr. Ware came home to dinner at five o'clock, and was thunder-struck when told that Marguerite had gone. He went up to her room. The note on the dressing-table caught his eye. He opened it, read it twice over, and then angrily tore it into fragments. He had no appetite for dinner, so he summoned Rachel, and said, curtly,—

"Mrs. Ware's father is seriously ill, and, in consequence, my wife may be obliged to remain away some time. Business will detain me at the State Capital for a month, perhaps longer. Shut up the house. I leave everything in your charge."

And the master as well as the mistress was gone to return no more.

Rachel's astonishment continued unbounded, but she did as she was bid. The blinds were closed, the furniture covered, and dust and desolation took possession of the home which had, for a time at least, been a pleasant one.

CHAPTER IV.

To love her was a liberal education.—STEELE.

IT was five o'clock, the first day of June, when Marguerite arrived at Somerton. No one expected her, and, in her black dress and changed appearance, no one recognized her. She walked along the old, familiar road, the short half mile between the depot and The Maples, feeling with every onward step that she was nearing her home. Old Bruno met her at the gate, and immediately set up such a ludicrous wagging of his great plumpy tail that one might have thought its owner gone mad with delight.

"You are glad to see me, dear old fellow. There, be quiet; I am come to stay. Your dog-love is better than the human love I've left behind me." She patted the large, knowing head that kept itself on a level with her hand, evincing every evidence of joy at her return.

Marguerite went directly to her father's study. She knew where to find him at that hour, and just the look his face would wear when the

shadow of the elm-tree began to darken the window and the silence of eventide pervaded the room.

"Father!" She was on her knees beside him.

"Marguerite, my child!"

She crept within his sheltering arms and laid her head on his bosom, with such a sudden outburst of passionate tears as he had never seen her weep before. He lifted her head, and looked long and earnestly in the tear-filled eyes and white, quivering face. The pitiful story was written there in language more eloquent than any words.

Without asking a question, he laid the poor weary head back again on his breast, and folded his arms tenderly around her. So he held her for many, many minutes. His white hair, as he bent above her, touched her brown locks, and the tears that dropped on Marguerite's hands were not all her own.

"I have returned to the old love and the old home," she said, wistfully. "I may stay with you always, now, may I not, papa?"

"Always, my darling. But are you sure you have acted wisely? It is all new to me. I cannot tell; but it is a serious matter, view it as one will."

"There was no other course left for me to pursue *but* to return to you. The one he preferred to me is—all that I am not; and so I came away."

"Do you know this for a truth?"

"For the very truth."

"Poor, poor child! Will it break your heart? Has it made a deeper wound than your old father's love can heal?"

"If you had made for yourself an idol, believing it to be formed of pure gold, and it should chance to be broken, and you were suddenly to discover that it was made of the commonest kind of clay, all cracked and seamed and full of unsightly places, would the knowledge break your heart?"

"No, surely. But was your idol, so noble outwardly, really made of such base material?"

"Maurice Ware and I, in this world, are forever parted. Ask me no more. Believe that I could do no less than I have done. We will never speak of it or of him again—never, papa." Mr. Van Cleaf respected his daughter's wishes, and never thereafter mentioned the name of Maurice Ware.

"I am to take my old place," continued Marguerite, cheerfully, caressing her father's

hand, "and I'll be very good and thoughtful of all your little wants."

"As if you were not always good, my dear."

"But I could have been so much better. When I was with you every day I grew careless of my blessings, but now I am older and wiser, and see more clearly than I did three years ago. I can be of some good every day. I can help others; I can be useful. My life shall not be a barren waste. There is work for me to do 'lying close about my feet.' I have my little grave, you know, my future, and my father," she said, the tears all gone from her eyes and the brave spirit that looked through them brightening wonderfully her face.

"Your father will go away some day,—very soon, perhaps,—and what will you do then, Marguerite?"

"Papa!" with a quick indrawing of her breath; "don't, papa, please don't say that now."

"But it will have to come, my child. I am weak and old, and every day admonishes me how low the sands are running in the glass."

"I will not think of it. I am going to take such excellent care of you, and make you so happy, that you will forget all about being old and feeble."

"Just my own bright sunbeam that you always were," he said, fondly; "my own little brown wren come home again, to gladden her old father's heart and scatter sunshine through the old house. Here comes Mrs. Andrews; her surprise will, no doubt, be as great as if you had dropped from the clouds."

Mr. Van Cleaf was not wrong in his conjecture. Jeannette, on seeing Marguerite, threw up her hands and sank into the nearest chair quite overcome with amazement.

"And you have never a word of welcome for your old nursling? I thought your love would not fail me, but I am disappointed," said Marguerite, assuming a reproachful tone which Jeannette knew very well was not meant.

"A hundred words of welcome, and love as warm and true as ever you will find anywhere, but I'm that astonished, you could knock me down with a feather. When and where and how did you come, and I not know a word of it till this blessed minute?" exclaimed Jeannette, all in a breath.

"I came nearly an hour ago. Bruno was glad to see me, and paid me every attention. I am going to remain a long, long time—until

papa is well and strong, and you are all thoroughly tired of me."

Jeannette shook her head dissentingly.

"You can't deceive me, Miss Marguerite,"—she always would say *Miss Marguerite*, though her mistress were married twenty times over;—"I'm not as clever as some others, but I know when a smile masks a sad heart as well as anybody. I said there was no good in a May marriage, and I'll stick to it," secretly pleased, in spite of herself, that her predictions had been verified, "though far be it for me to speak of that now. I'll have Susan bring in the tea right away, and glad she will be to do it this once, I'm sure."

Out trotted Jeannette, bursting with impatience to tell Susan and Caleb the joyful news—Miss Marguerite had come home to stay for a good long while. Susan's sleepy blue eyes opened wide in wonderment, and Caleb whistled "*Bonnie Dundee*" by way of expressing his pleasure.

Tea was served in the cosy sitting-room, Marguerite in her old place opposite her father pouring the tea, and Susan hovering at the back of her chair, anxious that her young mistress should eat, "for she did look so thin and pale-like, as if city air and food did not agree with her," as she afterwards told Jeannette, in the simpleness of her soul.

After the tea-things were cleared away, Marguerite spent a quiet hour alone with her father, but the subject of her troubles was not again touched upon. It was only nine o'clock when she bade him good-night, bending her head to receive his kiss and blessing as she did so, and went up to her room feeling more deeply than she had ever felt before, that it was good to be at home again. In a spirit of thankfulness she knelt down beside the bed and prayed that God might direct her footsteps, and aid her in doing some great good before He called her to himself.

"I've come to brush your hair, Miss Marguerite, for you are far too tired to do it yourself, even were the task not mine by right," and there in the doorway stood Jeannette, ready to take up the thread of a past habit, or pleasure rather, just where she had let it drop three years ago. It was so simply and so naturally said, precisely as if the child had never grown into a woman, and Marguerite's motherhood and worse than widowhood had never been.

"You're like your old self to-night, deary. I'd no faith in the May marriage, but I've confidence in the June coming home," said Jean-

nette, when the brushing was well under way. "You are not spoiled by city ways and the grand company Mr. Ware keeps. I've read about him in the newspapers. A great man already, and promising to be a greater one. Howsoever, *I've* not changed my mind; lawyers for the most part never have happy wives. They are too argufying and set in their ways."

"You must not forget that Mr. Ware is my husband. *Never* forget that, Jeannette," said Marguerite, very gravely.

"Ah, that's the worst of it," stoutly persisted the old housekeeper. "We are none of us likely to forget that while your cheeks are as white as they are now. Susan thinks it's the bad air, but I, well—I'll promise you not to forget that Mr. Ware is your husband."

"Jeannette!"

"One can't help thinking, and speaking, too, for that matter. I never did like him; but that's neither here nor there now. And there is Mrs. Arnold. They say her husband's in a decline; more's the pity, for they were as handsome and happy a couple as ever I saw."

"Poor Helen! She wrote telling me about her husband's declining health; but there are worse things in this world than death," said Marguerite, very sadly.

"Indeed there is. Lawyers and such like," was Jeannette's emphatic rejoinder.

"You really must not speak in that way. It—it pains me, Jeannette."

"And I would not pain you for the universe, only a lawyer is to me what water is to a mad dog. There, don't mind me, deary; I'm a meddling old body with more tongue than sense. You are not angry, Miss Marguerite?"

"No; but don't transgress again. When did you last hear from Mr. Arnold?"

"A week ago, and the doctor has no hopes of his recovery. It's a kind of quick consumption that there's no cure for."

"There is no flower, even the fairest, but has its shadow beneath it," sighed Marguerite.

"And there is Louis Hallack going to the bad as fast as ever he can, and breaking his poor old foolish mother's heart. A fine lad he was, too, and a good one, until he got in bad company."

"You mean the widow Hallack's son."

"Yes."

"I am sorry to hear it. She was so fond of the boy, and worked so hard that he might have a good education."

"Aye, that she did; worked early and late,

and scrimped and saved that Louis might have the learning of a gentleman; and what has it amounted to?—just nothing at all," answering her own question with great unction.

"You may go now, Jeannette; I am very tired, and long to lay my head on those inviting white pillows," said Marguerite, wearily.

"I can't tell what made me open and air your room to-day. It's been shut up for a six months."

"My good angel, I think, if I have one. How nicely you have arranged everything. Good-night."

And thus gently dismissed, Jeannette departed, and Marguerite, to her intense relief, was once more alone. She stood a moment before the open window, looking out into the dewy night, and what her thoughts were only He who notes the sparrows fall can tell.

Bruno, with a stately step and solemn air, walked to the middle of the path, and laid himself down in full view of Marguerite's window, as if he had a mind to lay there forever. She called to him softly, and he lifted his great silky head and looked up at her with eyes that were almost human in their mute expression of affection.

"Everything loves me here," she mused; "every one welcomes me home. How simple I was to ever leave it, how ignorant, how little fitted for any life but this."

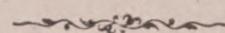
She undressed and went to bed, yes, and to sleep, leaving Bruno to his slumbers and the stars to their watch. She was at home again, thank heaven, at home with her father and those who loved her.

The next day Marguerite renewed her acquaintance with things animate and inanimate about The Maples, for she was like a child returning home after a long absence, and objects, even the most ordinary, took to themselves a new and, at the same time, strangely tender interest. The hawthorn blossoms seemed a purer white, the lilacs sweeter and more abundant. Even the unmelodious scream of the blue jay sounded pleasantly to her ear, and the graceful flight of the swallows, and the joyous song of the meadow larks, were as things seen and heard for the first time. The butterflies on the thistle-blooms were never before so airily beautiful, the hum of the bee was never so cheery, every face she met had a smile upon it, and every voice was full of loving gentleness.

If people gossiped, it was with suppressed, well-bred comment, that never descended to

vulgar questioning. Somerton folks were, as a class, refined and well-mannered, and those who knew Marguerite at all, knew her to be infinitely above everything that was common and debasing. Her father's failing health was the reason, and only reason, she gave for returning to The Maples, and the gossips were obliged to accept that explanation for lack of any other.

Marguerite spent much of her time with her father, and grew more and more fond of books and retirement. "Anguish is no sluggish spur to thought," and she began to read, to think, and to write. She had in her father a sympathetic friend and counsellor, in her books a teacher, and in her mind resources which prevented her from becoming morbid and embittered. To be useful, to do good, to make others happy, was now her sole desire, and without going far from her own door-stone she might do that. She need not go up and down the land vexing the heavens with sound, urging this or that reform upon whosoever would listen. She had but to put forth her hand, and, lo, her work was before her.



CHAPTER V.

As there is much Beast and some Devil in man, so is there some Angel and some God in him. The Beast and the Devil may be conquered, but in this life never destroyed.

COLERIDGE.

BERIAH COKE'S failure to enter into business relations with Mrs. Ware did not dishearten that worthy by any manner of means. Modesty never stood in the way of his turning an honest penny in his peculiar line of business, and in finding out and following up clews he had no equal. Theseus himself would have found no mean rival in this modern Coke, who, by the merest thread, slender as that furnished the slayer of the dreadful Minotaur, had tracked Maurice Ware like a sleuth-hound from place to place, with the hope of getting that dignified person into his power, and, when convinced he had a "dead sure thing," boldly demand a price for his silence. Jealous wives generally payed well and were easily managed, but Marguerite had rather astonished him by her scornful declination to avail herself of his services.

Mr. Coke haunted the outskirts of good society, ready to seize upon any circumstance, however trivial, which he thought might "lead up to something." But a good reputation, with a little underlying strata of immorality, is what

Coke most delighted in. Woe be to the proud lady of fashion whose intrigues, of whatsoever nature, were discovered by him, and luckless, indeed, was that man whose private virtues were not commensurate with his public claims to personal honor. Forbidden amours, family quarrels, or anything, in short, which smacked of high-toned scandal, was just so much capital to the enterprising Coke, being, in fact, his entire stock in trade, and requiring no investment, on his part, either in the way of character or conscience.

He was never known to "let up" on his victims; when once he had fastened on their purses, they must pay or take the consequences. He had seen Mr. Ware with a lady obviously not his wife. Who the mysterious woman was, he did not know; but it was plain to be seen that she belonged to the higher walks of life, and was one of those who toil not, neither do they spin, yet are arrayed in purple and fine linen, and keep the state of princess.

The features of Mr. Ware were familiar enough, but the lady—heavens! what would Beriah not have given for just one glimpse of her face! Baffled, but not discouraged, he straightway set about finding a clew. A clew is everything to a detective. Without it he is like a ship at sea without rudder or compass, he has nothing at all to steer by, and where to find this necessary adjunct to a beginning is what puzzled him. All of a sudden a bright idea crossed his mind. He would look up Mr. Ware's antecedents. Ten to one an affair of some sort could be unearthed worth Mr. Coke's while to know. He had his nose, so to speak, on the ground, and the scent led direct to Gillingham Row and Mrs. Tully's fourth floor, back. He was now fairly on the trail of Agnes and the *cidevant* law-student, and putting this and that together he felt quite confident, if the girl was pretty, that Maurice had not been generous. He knew nothing for certain, but he inferred a great deal, and an inference with Beriah was almost as good as a fact.

Since the night she left him in bitter scorn under the Somerton pines, Agnes had never laid eyes on Maurice Ware. She had returned to Gillingham Row and the cheerless attic, and lived as she could—starving and freezing in winter, starving and stifling in summer. She could have sold her beauty for bread, but the thought never occurred to her. Hers was the sin of loving. She never dreamed of adding to it the crime of the wanton. So she lived

and suffered on, until she began to doubt the justice of God and hide her face from the sight of men.

She paid two shillings a week for the privilege of staying in the attic, which she earned by "finishing off" gymnasium suits at five cents apiece for a rich up-town clothing-house. One can readily understand that this munificent remuneration did not allow of Agnes's indulging in many luxuries. She could "finish off" six suits a day if she worked from day-dawn to midnight, and earn thirty cents. Just think of it. Thirty cents a day to pay rent and provide food and fuel. Oh, Christian people, build your churches everywhere, but you will never hear in one of them a sermon so eloquent as this. The woman who fights the battle of life against such tremendous odds is braver than any soldier that ever faced death at the cannon's mouth.

Agnes was just folding a finished garment, when a shuffling step outside the door arrested her attention. She had such a dread of being "followed," that any unusual sound was sufficient to scare the blood from her cheeks and set her heart to beating wildly. In going to and returning from the great clothing house with her work, she had more than once been subjected to the rude attentions of men, who, attracted by her beautiful face, did not scruple to annoy and frighten her with their insulting compliments. Had one of these conscienceless wretches dared to seek her in the attic, and force his hated presence upon her? A low knock was followed by the immediate entrance of a small man, with rusty, black hair, foxy tufts of side whiskers, and deep-set ferret eyes. Agnes started up and stared at the intruder, pale with fear.

"I beg pardon," said the man, bowing respectfully. "I beg ten thousand pardons, if my sudden appearance has in any way alarmed you. Business, a mere matter of business. Pray, do not be frightened. Your name is Brandon, Miss Agnes Brandon?"

"I am Agnes Brandon," recovering somewhat from her terror. The fellow was so polite and shabby—not "a gentleman," heaven save the mark! Surely he could intend her no evil of the kind she feared.

"Just so. I am rarely mistaken. I seldom follow a false scent. That is, I am a person of acute discernment."

Mr. Coke—for it was that man of clews and chronic financial embarrassments, his sunken mouth one vast cave of smiles—coolly took

possession of the only chair in the room, and proceeded to unfold the nature of his business.

"We live in a world of changes, Miss Brandon, hem, changes which to some are for the better and to others are for the worse. I may venture to say that you have very little to be thankful for, very little, indeed."

"What do you mean?"

Agnes's blue eyes were fixed upon him with the simple, questioning gaze of a child.

"Only this, my dear Miss Brandon," with a reverential bow and an impressive outward movement of the hand that held his battered hat,—"only this, that I honor honest industry and, yes, I may say, hem, virtue starving in a garret more than I do idle, well-fed vice flourishing in a palace, so to speak."

"I do not understand you. Surely, I have done no harm."

"Far from it. You are the sacrificial lamb offered up, as it were, on the altar of man's wickedness. It is Maurice Ware who is the villain."

"Maurice Ware! What do you know of him?"

Her face grew perfectly colorless. Who was this creature, with receding mouth and cunning, watchful eyes?

"I know nothing good of him. A villain, pure and simple."

"And why tell it to me?"

"Because he deserves to suffer as he has made you suffer. Because high heaven calls for justice," shaking his hand aloft, with a fine burst of virtuous indignation. "Now is the hour of your triumph; vengeance has overtaken him at last, and his punishment rests in your hands alone."

"Mine?"

"Yes, yours. Listen." He drew his chair a little nearer and sank his voice to a confidential whisper. "I have Maurice Ware in the toils. We can destroy him. In me behold the humble instrument of your revenge."

Agnes drew back and looked him calmly in the face.

"I could have had my revenge long ago, had I so desired it. The fault was mine, perhaps; at least, I prefer to think it so. He is happy with the wife whom he loves, and not mine the hand to plant a thorn in his path."

"You are mistaken. He is untrue to his wife,—as false to Judge Van Cleaf's proud niece as ever he was to the poor widow's friendless daughter."

"False to his wife? She who was so good and noble? I will not believe it. You are deceiving me."

"Upon my soul, I am not."

"How came you to know it?"

"Business, purely in the way of business."

"It seems to me your business is of a kind that is really none of your business."

Agnes was amazed at her own temerity, and went on stinging, no longer afraid of him, the small, mean cowardice of his little soul was so apparent.

"What brought you here? and what have I to do with his being false or true to his wife?"

"I was looking up Ware's antecedents, and —"

"His what?"

"His antecedents,—his past,—and so I found you. What you have to do with it is just this. There is money in it, lots of money. Ware is rich and wants to go to the Senate. A scandal of the kind, if it were known, would ruin his prospects and defeat his hopes. Take my word for it, he'll bleed like an ox if we happen to hit the right vein. That's the plain, out-and-out English of it. And why should you spare this man who has spared no one? He tramples down whatever stands in his way, and ought not to expect mercy where he has shown none," rejoined Mr. Coke, making the most of his really strong point.

"If you know these things to be true, why do you not go to Mr. Ware and demand a price for your silence?"

This was a home-thrust. Truth to tell, he stood in wholesome fear of the great man whose footsteps, unknown to him, he might dog with impunity, but who would, no doubt, call his little business venture by a very ugly name were he to discover its true significance, and summarily hand him over to the police to be dealt with in a manner not at all pleasant to contemplate. Mr. Coke was not one to court danger, and reflection had taught him that certain dubious transactions of his own might come to the surface were he to attempt direct "negotiations" with Mr. Ware. No, women answered his purpose much better. They were more tractable and more easily frightened, as well as being more liberal when it came to making payments.

Seeing that he did not reply, Agnes replied for him.

"Shall I tell you why you do not go to Mr. Ware? It is because you dare not."

Beriah twisted uneasily in his chair and looked

at the girl curiously. "I came here as your friend, Miss Brandon, not your enemy." And one who did not know him would have thought his soul grieved to its inmost centre by her treatment.

"What is it you wish me to do?"

"Merely this. If you were to let Mr. Ware know that you were in possession of his secret, he might pay you handsomely to keep it a secret. You would divide generously with me,—that's understood, of course. Besides," here his ferret eyes twinkled villainously, "you are fair, and old memories—you understand."

She crimsoned to the temples.

"Mr. ——"

"Coke, Beriah Coke," he blandly interposed.

"Well, then, Mr. Coke, if that be your name, please believe me when I say that I have no claim on Mr. Ware—none whatever. I knew him when I was a child. He was kind to my mother, and—and I would not harm a hair of his head for millions. Starve I may, but not for my right hand would I do him an injury."

He knew that Maurice Ware had wronged her in a way that to have killed her outright would have been in the sight of God the lesser crime, but the fidelity, the something high and holy that shone in her eyes, compelled him, bad, unscrupulous man though he was, to respect the girl he had thought to use and bend like a reed to his wishes.

"And you will let this Ware go on and live in luxury while you sit here in rags, suffering for the very necessities of life?"

"I will leave him to God's impartial judgment. I am used to rags and hunger. Misery sits upon me as easily as does Maurice Ware's prosperity. His path and mine lie far apart, and in this world they meet no more. And now, sir, begone. Woman as I am, poor and friendless, I bid you begone, for I am not yet fallen so low as to clasp hands with such as you."

She threw the door wide open, and, proudly as any queen, ordered him from the room. There was nothing left for Mr. Coke to do but to obey. Muttering vengeance, he descended the rickety stairs a foiled, clewless, disappointed man. He had run his game to earth, but it had turned on him in a most unexpected and ungrateful way.

"Raising a figure or two on a bank-check may be admissible when a fellow is down on his luck, but it's a deuced uncomfortable feeling to know one might be nabbed for it at any

minute. But for that, I'd show Mr. Maurice Ware my hand, and call on him in little less than no time," grumbled the amiable Beriah, as he shook the dust of Gillingham Row from his feet, and set out in search of a clue to the mysterious veiled lady.

The moment her strange visitor had disappeared, Agnes caught up her bonnet, putting it on as she ran, and flew down stairs. In a few minutes she returned and laid on the deal table a sheet of paper and a thin, cream-colored envelope. The girl had never written a letter in her life, and it seemed to her a very formidable undertaking, more so than the finishing off of a hundred suits. But she must write to Mr. Ware, and, as well as she could, warn him of his danger. It took her a long time to think over what she wanted to say, and longer still to commit her thoughts to paper. She could not form all the letters readily, and her spelling was painfully uncertain. Every now and then she was obliged to stop and practise forming some particular hard word on the blank edge of an old newspaper which she called into requisition for the purpose. The important letter was finally completed, folded and sealed to the best of Agnes's poor ability. Now for the superscription. Her hand trembled, and the perspiration stood thick on her forehead. Finished at last, the letter lay on the table ready for the post. Three cents for postage, one cent for the sheet of paper, another for the envelope—she had borrowed the pen and ink of the obliging Mrs. Tully—the proceeds of the finishing off of one gymnasium suit expended in writing her first and only letter to Maurice Ware.

CHAPTER VI.

O thou Weed,
Who art so lovely fair, and smell'st so sweet
That the senses ache at thee,—would thou hadst ne'er
been born!

SHAKESPEARE.

THERE are many queer things done and being done at Washington which are not dreamed of in the philosophy of ordinary mortals. Time, always busy, goes there at a break-neck pace, and, presto! the men who are at the bottom of the ladder to-day, to-morrow are at the top. Beriah Coke was never a happy man unless he had, or was seeking, a clew to something or somebody which would enable him to put hush-money in his pocket, or, failing that,

lay bare to the gaze of a cold and censorious world the transgressions of those who, being "found out," refused to pay, and in so doing defrauded him of his rightful dues.

He had drifted to Washington with no definite clew to any particular person's misdeeds, but with an eye to business generally. He knew fashionable people were, with few exceptions, idle people, and that idleness is the parent of innumerable follies. The little molecules of imprudent love which are apt to fix themselves on society's best beloved, were to Coke perfect godsends. Had he been classically educated, he might have exclaimed, with the boldness of a Cæsar, "Give me the girdle of Aphrodite, and I will 'spot' the world!"

It was his custom to frequent the lobbies of the great hotels in the double capacity of a detective and an interviewer, and Washington presented a noble field for the exercise of his peculiar talents.

At one of the grand up-town hotels, a distinguished member of the lower house and his accomplished wife were holding their weekly reception. The elegant parlors above stairs, adorned with flowers, brilliantly lighted, and gay with exquisite toilets, were much too sacred apartments for Beriah to enter, ardently as he longed to do so; but there was nothing to prevent him from cooling his heels in the common waiting-room below, or to deter him from pressing his inquiring nose against the window panes in anxious quest of any stray bit of business which might chance to fall in his way.

Carriage after carriage drew up and deposited its load of magnificently attired ladies on the carpeted pavement. He heard the sweep of their silken trains up the grand staircase, and his soul yearned to know if any of them carried in their hearts past or present secrets of a dark and evil nature such as would be of value to him. They looked like vestals, and bore themselves like queens, yet he knew fine feathers went a long way towards making fine birds.

It was quite late when a carriage drew up at the curb, more gorgeous in its appointments than any that had preceded it. The liveried footman descended from the box and opened the door. A lady alighted, superbly dressed in azure silk and point lace, a white silk opera cloak thrown carelessly over her shoulders, and in her black hair blazed a diamond star of great value.

The sinister-eyed watcher at the window gave a violent start, for he saw on the lady's ungloved

left hand an amethyst ring with the initial letter *V* set in brilliants. Mr. Coke could not repress a cry of delight. The easy, graceful movement, the lithe, willowy form. Ah, he knew it well. And what a beautiful face! dark, crimson-lipped, sparkling. She passed on to the cloak-room, drew on her glove, settled her skirts, and disappeared amid the gay throng, the most enchanting, the most courted, the most adored of all the fair ladies there assembled. Coke turned to a bystander, who, like himself, was a looker-on in Vienna, but evidently a gentleman, and one well up in society matters.

"Do you know the name of the lady who just passed in?"

The stranger thus addressed surveyed the unprepossessing questioner rather discourteously before replying.

"She is the wife of a prominent Senator, and the handsomest woman in Washington."

Mr. Coke gave a low whistle of intense satisfaction.

"A bonanza, a perfect bonanza. I'm in luck, hurrah!" he muttered exultantly, his weasel features one vast pucker of smiles, and, without stopping to thank his informant, he rushed to the writing-room, availed himself of pen and ink, and for the next ten minutes was absorbed, heart and soul, in the construction of a letter such as none knew better than he how to write.

It was ten o'clock the following morning before the Senator's wife felt herself sufficiently recovered from the fatigue incident to the previous evening's entertainment to partake of coffee and toast served in her own room. She looked the picture of health and happiness as she sat languidly turning over the leaves of a fashion magazine. Her white cashmere wrapper, dotted here and there with knots of cherry ribbons, became her admirably, and set off to perfection the dark, wavy hair and clear, brunette complexion. Every article in the room denoted wealth, refinement, and taste. The costly silk hangings, the rich window drapery, the sumptuous furniture, and exquisite objects of *virtu* scattered profusely throughout the apartment, were all in keeping with the witching loveliness of the charming woman, who seemed born to bask in the smiles of fortune, and never to have known a sorrow or a care. But she had neither heart nor conscience — a mere piece of nature's most beautiful mechanism, without truth, feeling, or honor. A living, breathing lie, yet desperately ambitious, self-willed, and passionate. There was a something

indescribably wicked in her splendid eyes when the flash of anger got the better of their dreamy softness, and woe be to the lover who should dare to play *her* false. She was false herself, dangerously so; but it is to women like her to whom Congreve's lines best apply,—

Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned,
Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned.

“A letter for you,” said the servant, entering the room with a small silver tray on which lay a large yellow envelope. The whole aspect of the thing was plebeian, and smelled abominably of tobacco.

“Another begging letter, I suppose.”

The servant retired. She impatiently opened the letter, resolved to have nothing to do with the writer, whoever he might be. One glance was enough to dispel the fine-lady languor and blanch her face with fear.

This is what she read:—

Your secret is in my possession, but mum's the word if you come down handsomely. Great ladies must have their pleasures, but they must also pay for them. Remember Morceau's! A hint from me, and society will turn its back upon you, and know you for what you are—a disgraced, guilty woman. F. W. & Co.

P. S.—I forgot to mention that I am in somewhat straightened circumstances, and, as a mere matter of business, I take pleasure in stating that six hundred dollars (registered) sent to Fox, Wolf & Co., general post-office, Baltimore, will reach me. I shall expect it by the day after to-morrow *without fail*.

The woman sat staring at the letter in speechless terror. Struck in the dark, and by an unseen enemy, what could she do to ward off the blow? A step coming slowly up the stairs recalled her dazed faculties. She thrust the letter in her bosom, drew down the curtain, and threw herself on the sofa. A moment thereafter her husband, a benevolent-looking old gentleman, a good thirty years older than his wife, entered the room.

“Not ill, I hope, my dear?” he said, with evident concern, approaching the sofa, and taking her hand in his. “Why, how pale you are, and cold, too, as ice. You are certainly ill, Verona.”

“I've a wretched headache. The rooms were so close and so crowded last night, and we were so late getting home,” she replied, biting her lips to force back their color.

“I will stay with you. I can't really leave you in this state.”

“You alarm yourself needlessly. I have

only a headache, which a nap will cure. I was just falling asleep when you came in. I beg you not to remain; I would much rather be alone, for I am sure, then, to sleep.”

“I am sorry to have disturbed you, but I did not know you had a headache.” He kissed her affectionately, the beautiful young wife he loved so dearly, and went away, little dreaming how far his image was from being the one best beloved in that young wife's heart.

Before the echo of his departing footsteps had died into silence, she sprang to the door, locked it, took the terrible letter from her bosom, and read it again. Every word was like a scorpion sting, and made her shudder from head to foot. Her first thought was to send the money; but how could she raise so large a sum in so short a time? There were her jewels, she might dispose of them; but would she not be ever after at the mercy of this villain of villains if she complied with his demands? Her hands shook so violently the letter rattled in her grasp. Might she not be watched, followed wherever she went, and at all times and places be subject to the insolent espionage of the creature who was in possession of her secret? She felt as if every drop of blood in her veins was freezing about her heart. Every sound startled her, every voice seemed that of an enemy. A sudden saving thought flashed through her mind, and she caught at it as the drowning catch at straws—Mr. Ware; he could help her, he could save her. He had as much at stake as herself. It was a common danger with which they were menaced.

She drew her elegant ebony writing-desk to the window, and wrote rapidly for several minutes. The letter written, she enclosed within it the hateful epistle of Fox, Wolf & Co., sealed and directed it. Then she changed her dress, putting on the plainest her wardrobe afforded, and went out to post the letter.

She had no sooner reached the sidewalk, than a man glided from behind a large sycamore-tree in Scott Square, where he had been standing for more than an hour, as motionless as a blue crane on a cypress stump, watching the house and its unsuspecting occupants with a fidelity and patience worthy of a better cause. He wore a disreputable hat, very much depressed about the brim, from under which he looked after the lady with most approving eyes,—such swinish, cunning, villainous eyes, set in his prying countenance like a rat's, and everlastingly on the hunt for human prey. When they

looked approval, one might be certain that the devil and Beriah Coke were hobnobbing together quite fraternally.

"Just as I expected; she is going to open communication with Fox, Wolf & Co.," chuckled the jubilant Coke, as he saw the unconscious object of his watch direct her steps towards the post-office. "No servant, no lamp-post, is to be trusted with the letter she has to mail. Well, six hundred is not bad for a beginning. It's always better to commence light. They sort o' get used to it after you've let 'em play with the hook awhile." The cavernous mouth grinned detestably, and every seam, and wrinkle, and frayed button-hole of his seedy and ill-fitting garments seemed to share in the grin. Mr. Coke rejoiced with exceeding great joy, his whole being, so to speak, was one grand halleluiah. But he quite overlooked the possibility that an avenging Nemesis might be on his own track, and that the frightened woman he was stealthily pursuing might, unseen by him, and unknown even to herself, hold in her hand the sword destined to cut short the career of Beriah Coke, and rid the world, for a time at least, of his prodigiously brilliant detective talents.

Having safely deposited the letter in the post-office, the Senator's lady went home as fast as she could go, ran up to her room, tossed off her wraps, and sat down to collect her scattered senses. From ice she had turned to fire. Her cheeks were scarlet, her hands burning hot, and when her husband came home to dinner he found his wife indeed very ill. The doctor was sent for, who, when he came, pronounced it a case of low nervous fever; prescribed a sedative mixture, ordered the patient to be kept quiet, and gave it as his profound professional opinion that the cause of the lady's illness was directly traceable to overheated rooms and late hours.

While she lay in her darkened chamber suffering tortures of body and mind, Mr. Ware was composedly looking over his mail. He had been out of town for three days, and, when he reached his office at eleven o'clock, he found a large number of letters awaiting his perusal. All were of a business character except two. One of these was a dainty missive breathing of the boudoir, the other a thin, cream-colored envelope awkwardly addressed, the big "W" being far in the rear of the little "a," with no hope of ever overtaking it, and the stamp placed obliquely in the left-hand corner. By an odd coincidence, both letters lay together at the

bottom of the pile. Mr. Ware picked up the dainty missive and smiled queerly as he opened it. But he had no sooner read the first line than the smile changed to a frown, and from a frown became a look of mingled anger and alarm. And well it might, considering that this is what he read.

All is discovered. Within the hour I received the enclosed letter from some unknown wretch. For God's sake, tell me what to do! I'd rather die a hundred times than that the truth should be known. I am feeling dreadfully ill, and shall know no peace until I hear from you. V.

This letter he read but once, the communication of Fox, Wolf & Co., however, he honored with the closest attention.

"The infernal scoundrel," he muttered between his teeth. "I'd give a thousand dollars to know who wrote that beastly letter. He is no new hand at the business, curse him! It was no doubt from this source that Marguerite obtained her information. Ah, yes; this explains it, and makes it all as clear as noonday. She had no cause to fear him, burned his letter, or turned the fellow from the house if he ventured so much, of course, but—she went to Morceau's."

He brought his clinched hand down on the table with such ireful force that the unusual noise made the clerks in the adjoining room wonder what had happened to so anger their chief. The vehement bang drew his attention to the neglected cream-colored envelope. He snatched it up, looked at the post-mark, tore it open, and wonderful was the change that came over Maurice Ware's stern features. The expression of anger and alarm vanished, and something like tenderness stole into the hard, cold eyes that the moment before were so wrathfully contemplating the grim signature of Fox, Wolf & Co. It was not much to make a strong man tremble, the poor little letter written on a deal table in a garret, but to Maurice Ware it was living coals of fire, not only heaped upon his head, but on his heart as well.

A man has bin to see me, a bad man I think, who says his name is Beria Coke, and he has some sekret that will harm you, if it is non, for your wife's sake I'd not like to have you harmed.

AGNES.

He bowed his head on the hand that held the letter and sighed. He really did,—the first sigh of genuine regret that ever escaped his lips.

"Poor child. The worst treated and the best beloved!"

Again the Somerton pines were moaning in his ears, and beneath their darkling shadows a girl's white face, with pleading eyes and hair that was a glory, looked up in his, and asked the very question which, then denied, he now acknowledged to be true. But he could only give a sigh to the past, the present demanded all his attention, for the present concerned himself,—a person he was never known to forget.

"Coke. Let me see," he reflected, gravely. "Where have I heard that name before? Ah, I remember there was a fellow hanging around Washington, when I was there last winter, who called himself Coke. Tried to interview me, the rascal. I think he was from Burlington, Vermont."

He drew towards him a sheet of paper, and wrote the following dispatch, addressing it to the Chief of Police of the above named city.

"Do you know anything of one Beriah Coke?"

This done, he summoned a clerk and sent him with it to the nearest telegraph office. Within two hours the wires returned the highly satisfactory answer,—

"One Beriah Powers, alias Lock, alias Coke, is a native of this place. Was arrested a year or so ago for obtaining money on a forged or raised check. Case never tried. Indictment still pending in our courts."

Mr. Ware's countenance expressed the liveliest satisfaction. He immediately wrote two letters, very dissimilar in character, but both were of a nature likely to dash the hopes and ruin the rosy prospects of unfortunate Mr. Coke. The first was to a young lawyer of Burlington whom Mr. Ware chanced to know, a bright, promising sprig of the law, who had his first important case yet to win, and was sufficiently needy to insure activity, and make the promise of a large fee the effective means of sharpening his wits, and putting his legal acumen to the test.

There is an indictment standing in your courts against a person calling himself Beriah Coke. Spare no trouble nor expense in having him brought to trial. He is now in Washington. Enclosed please find my check for five hundred dollars.

M. WARE.

The other note was brief and non-committal enough. "*There is no occasion for alarm. You did exactly right in referring the matter to me.*"

That was all; but its receipt by the Senator's beautiful wife proved a more potent nerve-tonic than any prescribed by learned Dr. Fogg.

Having, as he felt quite sure, blocked Mr. Coke's little game, Maurice Ware took his hat, and, as he passed from his private office on his way out, said to his confidential clerk, "Say to any one who may call that I'll not be in town for a week."

He was a man of few words and no explanations. The next moment he was gone, whither not a soul about the office knew.

Great was the astonishment of several small boys playing in front of Mrs. Tully's respectable lodging-house, Gillingham Row, to see a gentleman of exceeding grand appearance pause in their noisy midst, and ask, in a voice so deep and severe that it made the less courageous of them tremble, "If a girl by the name of Agnes Brandon still lived with Mrs. Tully?"

"Yes, she do," piped a very small boy with a very dirty face. "Away up in the attic. I'll show you, mister. Mother and me and sister Sally we live in the fourth floor, back, we do."

The gentleman threw the urchin a dime, and curly bade him show the way. The sight of the dime made the whole clamorous troop emulous of being guides, and "Give us a quarter, mister; give us ten cents; give us a penny," were echoed on all sides.

Extricating himself by main force from the swarm of applicants, he followed the fourth floor boy, who nimbly sprang up the stairs two at a time, his bare, brown feet scarcely making a sound. At the fourth floor landing the gentleman abruptly dismissed the eager youngster from further attendance.

"I know the way. Go back to your playfellows, and here is a half dollar for your trouble."

The boy's bare feet skipped down as lightly as they had skipped up, his eyes big with surprise and pleasure, the half dollar held tightly in his hand being, in his estimation, little less than the fortune of a Rothschild. The stranger slowly continued his way upward, walking like one familiar with the dark, winding staircase. Pausing before the door of the attic-room, he tapped softly. No answer. He tapped a little louder; still no answer. He pushed open the door and went in. Agnes was not there, but he would wait. Seating himself in the stiff wooden chair so lately occupied by the urbane Mr. Coke, he took a look around the low-walled garret. The hard, narrow bed, with one limp

pillow and very scanty covering; the rude deal table, the high stool, and bit of broken looking-glass propped up against the wall. How well he remembered every object there. On the dingy window-ledge lay an old newspaper, on the margin of which were scrawled letters and fragments of words which it was not difficult for him to guess the meaning of. There were several attempts to spell "secret" correctly, all ending in failure, and "been" met with no better success.

"If it's Agnes Brandon you are waiting to see, you will wait a long time, I'm thinking, for she went away yesterday," said a sharp voice behind him. The stranger dropped the paper and turned towards the speaker.

"Miss Brandon gone?"

"Well, of all things,—Mr. Ware, as I live!" cried Mrs. Tully, recognizing her former lodger in the stranger whom Billy Mullens had just told her had gone up to see "blue eyes," that youth being unaware, as he afterwards stated, that Agnes had "skipped."

"So you remember me, Mrs. Tully. I came to see Miss Brandon. We were warm friends once, you know. And you tell me she is gone. Do you know where?" giving his hand—not very cordially, it must be confessed—to the lone letter of rooms.

"Remember you? Why, of course I do. And well do I remember your kindness to the Brandon's: Agnes never had such another friend. But I can't tell you where she went. Poor girl, I wish I could."

"Do you know the reason of her going away?"

"A strange man came here a few days ago, straight up to the attic, without saying a word to anybody,—a sneaking, good-for-nothing fellow, if ever there was one,—and he frightened her terribly. A body can't keep the front door shut when there are so many children everlastingly runnin' in and out. But she was a good girl, was Agnes, and I can't say any wrong of her. It was the badness of men as was tempted by her pretty face."

"The fellow annoyed and frightened her, and she ran away to be rid of him,—is that it, Mrs. Tully?"

"Yes, I suppose it is. And when Billy told me as how another strange man had gone up, I just hurried after him, determined to give him in charge; but, laws, Mr. Ware, I never dreamt of it bein' you," replied Mrs. Tully, courtesying with an air of apology.

"How did she live?" austere ignoring the allusion to himself.

"Well, it could n't be called livin'. She paid her rent regularly; though, poor as I am, I never pressed her. She worked early and late for the clothing-houses, and so managed to keep herself from starving, poor young thing: I hope she has found as safe a shelter as she left behind. She has never been away but once, and that was just before you were married; I recollect the time on that account, and the fourth floor back bein' vacant. She never said where she went to, though she was gone three months."

"Gone three months?" Mr. Ware started and looked hard at his former landlady.

"Yes, a good three months; and that was mysterious, I must say. She came back pale as a ghost; said she'd been sick; begged me to let her return to the attic, and I'd not the heart to refuse her, though I was dubersome about her bein' away so long."

"It was very kind of you to pity the girl. No doubt she went away hoping to get work that would pay her better, failed, and want and disappointment made her ill."

"That must have been the reason of it, though there was no need of her being so close-mouthed about it, as I can see. She never sang again, nor smiled, nor said anything, but just lived on, working like a slave and never complainin', until this man came. Then she paid her rent, said she was going away never to return; and I know no more than that, Mr. Ware."

"If she *should* return, I beg of you to treat her kindly, Mrs. Tully. Poor girls with handsome faces have a hard time of it, at best. Here is a trifle to reward you for past kindnesses, and to help you remember that good deeds are never forgotten, at least not by me."

With this pious reminder, the sagacious lawyer put a bank-note in the widow's hand, knowing it to be a far more powerful argument in favor of Agnes receiving a kindly welcome, were she to return, than any mere words could render, beside going a long way towards clearing from her mind those "dubersome" thoughts that for a time clouded with suspicion the singular movements of her attic lodger.

"Well I know it, Mr. Ware. If everybody were like you, there'd be no sin nor want nor sorrow in the world. We are poor enough in Gillingham Row; but we are Christians, for all that, and would n't see a dog starve. You may depend upon it, I'll be like a mother to Agnes if she returns."

"Thank you. I shall deem it a personal obligation, a favor rendered to myself, and in like degree to be rewarded."

Mr. Ware made his way down stairs followed by Mrs. Tully, all smiles and bows, her ample bosom surcharged with Christian benevolence and womanly emotion. At the street-door she bade him good-by, visions of future gratuities of bank-notes floating pleasantly through her brain, to the utter routing of all dubious surmises past, present, or to come.

Amid a perfect storm of "Give us a penny, mister!" in which ill-bred vociferations, it is sad to relate, Billy Mullens took an active part, Mr. Ware walked rapidly away from the disagreeable neighborhood of Gillingham Row.

"My eye!" cried the youthful Mullens, giving his diminutive trowsers a hitch to keep them in place. "My eye, what a cove! He's a rum chap, he is; and would n't Agnes a been proud to a seen him? He ain't a bit like old Foxey, as come tother day, and scared her a most to death."

When Mr. Ware reached home after his visit to Mrs. Tully's, he sat himself down in his luxurious easy-chair to think the matter over. It was not of Marguerite he thought, nor yet of the "veiled mystery," but of Agnes, who had not where to lay her head. Money! he had plenty of it now; but he had not that without which all men are poor indeed—a conscience at peace with itself.

While the great lawyer sat there pondering many things, Beriah Coke was walking up and down the gentlemen's parlor of the Arlington in no joyful frame of mind. He had just returned from Baltimore, angry and disappointed, for no registered letter came to rejoice the heart and replenish the pocket of Fox, Wolf & Co.

He had taken an early opportunity to inform himself of his victim's serious illness, and came to the conclusion to wait until her nerves were more composed before renewing his demands. A very magnanimous decision, he thought, which was rudely dispelled by a heavy hand laid firmly on his shoulder, and a gruff voice whispering close to his ear,—

"You are wanted, Mr. Coke."

"Wanted! What for?"

"Forgery."

"But there is some mistake."

"Not a bit of it, my fine gentleman. I have a warrant for your arrest on the requisition of the Governor of Vermont." Pale fear set its white imprint on the cowering wretch's face, and Beriah Coke was led away manacled.

CHAPTER VII.

Many a man's vices have at first been nothing worse than good qualities run wild.

ANON.

LEWIS HALLACK'S father died while his son was yet a mere infant, leaving him no other inheritance than an honest name, the little brown house at the foot of the hill, and its bit of stony garden. The lad was naturally of a bright, generous disposition, and as he grew up early won for himself the reputation of being a clever scholar and a good fellow. Much too good a fellow and too easily led away, for at twenty-four he had acquired a taste for strong drink and the society of dissolute companions, living a life of shame and reproach to himself and of sorrow and disappointment to his mother,—that mother who had sacrificed so much for him, who had pinched and toiled year after year that Lewis might have a good education, and be fitted to fill an honorable place in the world when the time came for him to put forth a man's energies and join the great army of the world's workers.

Marguerite had said there was work for her to do "lying close about her feet," and so, meeting him one day, about a month subsequent to her return to Somerton, she pleasantly accosted him:

"I am glad to have met you, Mr. Hallack, for there is something I wish to say to you. I may walk with you a little way, may I not?"

Lewis was immeasurably surprised.

"Walk with me, Mrs. Ware? *Would* you walk with me?"

"Certainly; and that's the very thing I want to talk to you about. How is it that you can be so unjust to yourself?"

A flush of shame reddened his bearded cheek. He was a tall, strong fellow, nearly two years her senior; but he might have been her son, from the gravity of her manner and the deference he paid her.

"I know I am a failure, Mrs. Ware; a complete, irrevocable, irredeemable failure."

"And why?"

"Because I have thrown away my opportunities, wasted my time, drifted into bad company. I disbelieve in, despise, and distrust myself."

"And to do so is wrong, all wrong. Suppose, Lewis,"—she laid her hand encouragingly on his arm—"suppose you leave the bad ways and evil company, and begin anew."

"How can I? Who will trust me? who

will believe in me? who will lend me a helping hand?"

"I will."

"You?"

"Yes; for I cannot bear to see you so unkind to yourself."

"But I have neither money, friends, nor reputation."

"Did you ever hear of Adam Zeverley?"

"The Cleveland banker? Yes: a hard, reserved, money-loving man."

"You are mistaken. He is a just, kindly, and, where it is deserved, a generous man. Mr. Zeverley is my friend. I will give you a letter to him, and advance sufficient means to —"

"Marguerite—Mrs. Ware, I am desperately poor, so poor, indeed, that I have not even thanks to give you; but —"

"And I want none," she interrupted, quickly. "The money is but a loan, to be repaid when you find yourself able to do so. But, promise me, Lewis, promise me on your honor as a man, nay, on your oath as a Christian, that you will hereafter let strong drink alone. Here, with only God and a woman to witness the vow, lift your right hand heavenward and promise me you will never, never again touch the deadly poison found in the wine-cup. It is the enemy men put into their mouths to steal away their brains—their curse, their ruin, their shame, their ultimate death both of body and soul. You will promise me, Lewis?"

Her earnest eyes were searching anxiously the troubled face that paled and flushed like a school-boy's beneath her pleading gaze.

"I promise you most solemnly, Marguerite, and may God never forgive sin of mine if ever I break my word. I am done with both bad company and bad liquor. But I cannot see why it is that you do not despise me; every one does but my mother."

"Faults and weaknesses are not crimes such as—as one cannot forgive. You only require a little assistance at the beginning. Let me be your friend and helper at the outset, for well I know you will need my help but for a little while!"

"My good angel—the best and truest and noblest woman God ever made!" he burst out, passionately. "If I do not live worthy of your friendship, I am not fit to live at all."

"Nay. I am selfish; for, in helping you, I am merely trying to find a balm for my own sorely wounded heart," she answered, sadly.

"I have not deserved your kindness, and I

cannot find words wherewith to express my thanks; but believe me that I am grateful, so grateful that language fails me, and I can only feel your goodness."

"A nature that is capable of gratitude is never to be despaired of. Disraeli says 'that the great secret of success in life is for a man to be ready when his opportunity comes.' I believe you to be ready. I offer you the opportunity; improve it, and be a man."

"I will; so help me, heaven, *I will!*"

"Then I am repaid already, a hundred times repaid; and I am going now to see your mother."

Mrs. Ware held out her hand; he took it reverently, lifted it to his lips, and in a second had disappeared beyond the bend of the river.

Marguerite slowly continued her walk towards Mrs. Hallack's cottage, a little band-box of a house, with morning glories and scarlet runners trained to the very eaves, and a mammoth hydrangea growing in a tub beside the doorstep. From her babyhood, Marguerite had been a prime favorite of dame Judith Hallack's, who was an eccentric old body, surprisingly brief of speech, and in all the wide world had but two things to love, one of which was her son, whom she idolized, the other being no less a personage than Benny, the largest and handsomest gray puss in all Somerton.

Marguerite's entrance in nowise served to banish from the widow's wrinkled face the look of anxious care that seemed to have fixed itself permanently on her faded old countenance, and set its restless watch in her age-dimmed eyes. Marguerite well understood what her furtive glances out of the window meant, for the poor soul was in mortal dread of Lewis coming home in a state such as she would rather die than have Mrs. Ware witness, and, to quiet her fears and relieve her doubts, Marguerite said, after kindly inquiring after the old lady's health, and admiring the thrift of the scarlet runner,—

"Lewis came part of the way with me, and we had quite a long conversation, mostly in relation to his future prospects. He is going away, Mrs. Hallack."

"Going away? Lewis going away?" cried the widow, sharply, the pain at her heart betraying itself in her voice.

"Only to Cleveland. I think Mr. Zeverley will give him a situation in his banking-house. An humble one, at first; but if he merits promotion, which I am confident he will do, he is sure to have his merits recognized."

Mrs. Hallack nervously ran the hem of her

gingham apron through her fingers, so overcome as to be unable to utter a word.

"It is better than remaining here. Do you not think so?"

"God bless you, Mrs. Ware. I know what you mean, but a kinder, a more generous, or a more honest heart does not beat in any bosom than beats in that of my Lewis. He has the education of a gentleman, and, when he is himself, no man has a better head for business; but it's the liquor, Miss Marguerite, that puts the learnin', and the love, and the good all out of him."

The gingham apron went up to old Judith's eyes to hide the tears that began to find their way down her furrowed cheeks.

"We will hope and trust in the future to redeem the past," replied Marguerite, cheerily. "He simply needs a little help and encouragement at the start; and if you will give me pen and ink, Mrs. Hallack, we will begin the good work now."

Wondering what it was she was going to do, the old woman left the room, returning after a moment's absence with the desired articles, and without a word placed them on the table before Marguerite. There was nothing very remarkable in what Mrs. Ware did. She merely took a slip of paper from her pocket-book, filled in a few figures, and then handed it to Mrs. Hallack.

"Give this to your son when he returns. There were some things which I could not speak to him about. He will need suitable clothing, such as will become his new sphere of life, and your own motherly heart will tell you what else beside. If we are patient, I am certain that we will make a man of Lewis yet, and so good-evening."

The widow never stirred; she sat perfectly still, staring straight before her like one in a dream. Marguerite was half-way down the garden path when the wild, grateful cry of "Marguerite, Miss Marguerite!" arrested her footsteps, and the sobbing old creature was on her knees beside her, covering the hand she had seized with tears and kisses.

Marguerite raised her up tenderly.

"No, no; don't thank me, please don't. I am only too glad that I am able to help you. It is something infinitely precious for me to know that I can be useful. Do not rob me of my dearest pleasure — I who have so few."

"But some day he will repay you, I am sure he will, Miss Marguerite."

"And so am I. The world is full of want and misery. You will find a way to do good in your turn, some day. Never fear but what the opportunity will come, and when it does, then pay your debt, if so be you think you owe me aught."

With that Marguerite turned away and hastened homeward, leaving dame Hallack to enter the house and seat herself in her high-backed easy-chair, so happy and so thankful that the tears would persist in streaming down her cheeks faster than she could wipe them away, while Benny rubbed affectionately against her knees, and from pure sympathy purred his loudest, although, in his cat way, he looked somewhat astonished, as if he could not quite make out what it was all about.

It was nearly dark when Lewis came in. His mother could not see his face for the dusk and the crying that had half blinded her, but she felt the presence of a new and a better purpose in his step and in the resolute way he opened and shut the door.

"Mrs. Ware has been here," she began, timidly, "and I —"

"Yes, I know she has. Mrs. Ware is an angel, and you are far too good a mother to such a worthless son as I have been; but I am going to do differently now, for I am going away tomorrow. Somerton has seen the last of me until I can return a man, and not ashamed to look any one in the face."

He put a hand on either withered cheek and kissed her most affectionately. "You believe me, mother; for, bad as I am, I am not a liar, and I promised Marguerite that I'd let rum alone for the future; and, God helping me, I am going to do it."

"Oh, Lewis, Lewis!" And the old mother fell to crying again as hard as ever she could. "If you do but keep your promise to let rum alone, the bad company will go with it, and you will be rid of the only enemy you ever had. I am ignorant, old, and poor, but I am your mother, and I love you."

"Hush. Don't speak like that: it hurts me cruelly."

"Ah, well-a-day, don't mind me. Here is the paper Mrs. Ware left for you."

Old Judith had never seen a bank-check before, and had not the slightest idea of the paper's value.

"A check, and for three hundred dollars! Why, it's a fortune, mother."

"Money! Do you mean to tell me it is

money, that scrap of paper?" gasped the astonished old woman.

"Certainly it is, or what is as good as the money. Marguerite is not only a noble woman, but she is a thoughtful one as well. She knew that I had not decent clothes, nothing fit to wear in a banker's counting-house, and was a miserable, penniless vagabond, yet she tries to save me from feeling more debased than I am." The paper shook in his hand, and he hid his face to conceal the tears he could not bear even his mother to see.

After supper, instead of going out, as he usually did, Lewis went up to his room, and, as he stood with his hand on the chamber-door, he said:

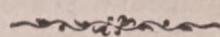
"Have my things ready in time, for I am going to-morrow evening."

"Aye, that I will," replied she; "and a kiss and a good-night to you, for long, indeed, will it be ere you sleep again under the old home roof."

The next night found young Hallack on his way to Cleveland. Marguerite's letter to Mr. Zeverley, mailed the evening previous, reached the banker some hours in advance of Lewis; and, when he presented himself for personal inspection, the old millionaire merely said, "I take you into my service solely on Mrs. Ware's recommendation; and see to it, young man, that you prove worthy of the good opinion she has of you." Then he called a clerk, to whom he said, quite as concisely, "Show Mr. Hallack his desk, and acquaint him with the nature of his duties." And in this brief manner Lewis was assigned a place in the great banking-house of Zeverley & Flint, and resolutely set about the task of making himself a man.

Mr. Zeverley knew Marguerite to be a woman of sound judgment and no ordinary gifts of mind. He had met her frequently at her husband's house, and formed a very high estimate of her character. She had said in her letter that she felt assured Mr. Hallack would be a credit to those who took an interest in his welfare. This satisfied Mr. Zeverley as to the young man's honesty, and as to the rest he was willing to take the risk, and give him a chance to redeem himself if Lewis was sincere in his promise of reformation. It was a proud and happy day for the fond old mother, when she placed in Marguerite's hand her son's letter detailing in glowing terms the banker's kindness, though at first he seemed so stern and cold. In a single line he told of his promotion and ended by saying,

"Tell Mrs. Ware it is my first step upward, and, no matter how high I may climb, I shall never forget that it was she who saved me from—myself."



CHAPTER VIII.

Famine is in thy cheeks,
Need and oppression starveth in thy eyes,
Upon thy back hangs ragged Misery,
The world is not thy Friend, nor the world's laws.

SHAKESPEARE.

THE short October day was drawing to a close, yet Marguerite still lingered beside her baby's grave, trimming with loving hands the few hardy flowers that the blighting breath of the frost-king had spared. The double pink rose geraniums stoutly defied the nipping autumn air, and were as green and fragrant as in early summer. The roses had faded and the myrtle looked sear and lifeless, but the chilling winds had not killed everything that was once bright and beautiful. What had the baby eyes seen since they closed on earth to open again in the land of the undying? Whither were the little feet journeying beyond the gates of pearl in the golden city of the blest? Marguerite could not answer. Who is there that can? A pewee among the willows down by the water's edge, uttered a plaintive call "like a wandering voice." The low, mournful note drifted past her on the evening wind, dying away in the silent distance. Marguerite arose, and slowly wended her steps homeward. But just as she was nearing the river where the bank was steep and the current swift and strong, she saw a woman whose movements were peculiarly strange. It was a lonely spot, with an old, half-dead chestnut-tree standing a little back from the clump of willows that partly screened her from view. Marguerite stopped, and, without attracting the woman's attention, looked at her curiously. She was thinly clad, slender and young, as she saw by her active manner, for she was not near enough to make out her features. After walking up and down the bank two or three times, as if undecided what to do, the poor creature sat down at the foot of the old tree, clasped her hands about her knees, and rocked herself to and fro in an agony of mental suffering. A bundle lay on the ground beside her, containing her earthly all, and which had evidently met with hard usage during its owner's aimless wanderings. Finally, she started up, threw off her faded bon-

net and shawl, caught up the bundle, walked resolutely to the water's edge, and, with all the strength she could command, hurled bonnet, shawl, and bundle far out into the river. They were gone in a moment, borne away by the restless current. The woman gazed at the spot where they had disappeared with the look of a maniac meditating some awful deed. Twice she shudderingly drew back, but as many times advanced, staring affrightedly at the deep, still water. A pile of saffron-hued clouds in the west threw a cold, sickly light over the darkening landscape, tinting the woman's yellow hair a richer golden, and bringing into strong relief the ghastly paleness of her haggard features.

There was no mistaking her purpose now. That fixed, stony expression of utter despair admitted of but one interpretation. She covered her white face with her trembling hands; a wild prayer for mercy and forgiveness parted the pale lips, and in another second the poor unfortunate would have plunged headlong into the river had not a firm hand held her back, and prevented her by main force from carrying out her desperate design.

"Woman, are you mad, that you dare face eternity in this dreadful way?"

At the sound of Marguerite's clear, rebuking voice, the miserable creature shrank cowering to the earth, as pitiable an object of wretchedness and fear as ever mortal eyes beheld. "I am not mad," she moaned. "If I am, it is from hunger and heart-anguish, such as one like you never knew the meaning of. The world is cruel, cruel, and will neither let me live nor let me die."

"Come with me."

Marguerite quietly returned to the seat she had just quitted under the fir-tree, near the spot where her loved one lay buried, and said:

"You, who are desperate enough to attempt self-murder, are not afraid of the nearness of a little dust gone back to dust?"

"It is the living I fear, not the dead. I have learned to hide by day and wander by night, because I am one of those whom women shun and men cry out upon, as if it were a Christian duty to hunt me down to death."

"I brought you here that you might rest, and get a little warmth into your chilled body before going farther. Sit down. You are trembling in every limb, and really unable to stand. Let me give you this."

Marguerite took off the soft, warm shawl she wore and wrapped it around the shivering girl;

for, in appearance, she was only a girl, with youth's tender mouth and submissive eyes, and too weak and weary to offer more than a feeble resistance.

"Take it. I am well and strong. Hunger has not thinned my blood, nor sorrow broken my heart. Now, tell me who you are, where you came from, and why you wish to die."

The girl turned her worn face towards Marguerite, and answered almost fiercely, "What matters it who I am or where I came from. Can you not see what I am? A wandering, despairing, miserable outcast, who only asks of the earth a grave. There is no rest for me anywhere. Men find me out, hide where I will, and hunt me down, let my life be harmless as it may. And you can ask why it is that I wish to die?"

"I ask because I pity you, and because it is my duty to help you."

"Your duty to help me. You!" the girl laughed bitterly. "I am not sure but what I am speaking to an angel. The place is so full of graves, one might have descended from heaven and taken mortal shape here among the dead."

The hollow eyes chanced to light on the memorial stone at her feet. A little sleeping lamb, and beneath it the name and inscription:

RICHARD,
INFANT SON OF MAURICE AND MARGUERITE
WARE.

DIED, MAY 25, 187—,
Aged one year and five days.

The girl sprang up, threw off the shawl, and looked wildly around her, as if meditating in which direction to flee.

"You are Marguerite—you are Maurice Ware's wife, and this is the grave of your child—your child and his?"

"Yes. You speak the name as if it were one with which you had long been familiar. Tell me who you are."

"I." She looked up vacantly. "I am Agnes Brandon."

"Well, then, Agnes Brandon, I pray you be comforted. 'T is always darkest just before the dawn; and, if you will let me, I'll be your friend, and the past, be it what it may, shall be as a sealed book between us, the contents of which I'll never seek to know."

"You my friend. You of all women!"

Agnes Brandon, Mrs. Tully's runaway lodger, burst into a perfect storm of tears and protests.

"No, no. The world would never forgive you, if you were to befriend one like me. Never. I know it, and it is cruel, cruel, cruel!"

"The world is a very unjust censor. I am not one who fears it; and you are young to have felt its cruelty so keenly—young and beautiful."

"All my life my face has been against me. I hate it! Once I thought to disfigure it so that wicked men would let me alone. I have prayed on my knees to be old and ugly, that I might escape bold stares and insulting smiles, and be allowed to earn my bread in peace. Don't say that I am beautiful; don't speak of me as being young and fair. I came here to die, because it was at Somerton I saw *him* last, there among the pines. Ah, that was a horrible, horrible awakening. Oh, how his words cut into my heart! I feel the sting of them yet. And when I had thought to make my life one long atonement, then came this other wretch, with his false smile, tempting me to sell my soul for money, money! and so I fled. I slept by the roadside, like any other houseless animal. I ate the crusts thrown at me, and tried to be thankful; but I was only desperate, and by and by I came to believe the river the kindest bed I was ever likely to know. Sleep there would at least be dreamless, and I would be beyond the reach of want and suffering."

Marguerite could make nothing out of the girl's excited incoherency more than was conveyed in the manifest fact of her being poor and unhappy, and the implied admission that she had at some time or other been cruelly wronged.

"Poor child! yours has, indeed, been a hard lot. Still, you had no right to touch your life, however wretched you might be."

"What better could I do?"

"Live."

"Live! But how?"

"Yes. Live, live worthily and well. Men do not die for sinning as you have sinned. If they did, the wayside would be strewn with corpses, and every dwelling would be a charnel-house. No; they do not die; then why should you? Have not you, and I, and all woman-kind, the right to repentance; the right to say to men, 'shame leaves no deeper mark on our foreheads than it does on yours,' the right to demand that the waters which wash them clean shall make us also pure? Why brand us outcasts, when the maker of outcasts goes unchallenged and unpunished?"

"Oh, but you do not know," gasped Agnes, clasping her hands entreatingly.

"But I *do* know. What harm can you do me? Your sin is but a feather weight compared to that of one whom I have known. Only he was a man, a man forsóoth; and the world smiled upon his sin, smiled and loved him all the more, though he was untrue to wife and child, looked in their faces, kissed their lips, and all the while was as false as falsehood can make itself."

Marguerite was at her grandest. Agnes pushed back a cloud of golden hair, and sat gazing at her in a kind of shuddering trance of awe and bewilderment.

"He was never true to any one," she said, slowly. "I was but a child. I did not know, before God, I did not know, what it was I risked. I have been starved, trodden upon, and hunted from post to pillar, but I've done no wrong since—since I knew it *was* a wrong. It was before, long before—"

A flood of tears choked her utterance, but a something in her disconnected words betrayed the truth to Marguerite. She involuntarily drew back her hand, the knowledge filled her with a new and sudden anguish such as she had never experienced before, but in a moment she had conquered the feeling of repugnance, natural as it was, and very sad and unreadable were the eyes that looked down on the little myrtle-covered mound, her heart silently thanking God that it was her baby's grave, for when such a discovery comes to a wife and mother, death is indeed a consoler.

"Were it my own brother who had done you so great a wrong, I'd not hold him one whit the less guilty, or be the less your friend," she said, steadily, evincing no outward sign of emotion.

"Oh, don't, don't," sobbed the girl, convulsively, "don't pity me, don't befriend me. Let me go away, and take my misery with me. I cannot bear that *you* should pity me."

"But I do pity you. See!"

Marguerite broke a tiny branch from the geranium and put it in her hand. "Keep it as a reminder of the dawning of a better day. Without earth, water, or roots, this noble flower will make a brave effort to live. It is a plant which will not die for a few bruises or a few rough shakes of the wind; it will even bear a frost or two with no visible injury to leaf or blossom. But you are rested now. Come."

Agnes mechanically arose and followed her

new friend, whither she neither knew nor cared. When they had passed the willows, the spot where Agnes had contemplated that awful act of self-destruction, crossed the bridge, and gained the opposite shore, Marguerite stopped, and pointed to a light shining from a cottage window not far away.

"Go to the little house you see yonder under the hill. Let the light be your guide. It will not lead you astray, and say to mistress Judith Hallack that you are in need of food and shelter, and that Marguerite Ware sent you to her. Tomorrow I will send you a friend — one who will keep your secrets, who will never give you a reproachful look, and never weary of your company. Good-night."

Marguerite turned into the road that led to The Maples, leaving her strange companion to make her way to the widow's cottage. It was now quite dark, and a chilly wind crept down from the mountains. But it was not the cold that made Marguerite shiver.

"I could not take her home after knowing that it was he who — Heaven help me! Will I never be done knowing of his sin?" Only to the darkness did she utter the thought, but the heart in her bosom beat stormily and bitter tears crowded their way to her eyes.

Agnes dragged her weary limbs to the cottage, from the window of which beamed the friendly light, so exhausted that she had hardly strength left to lift the heavy, old-fashioned iron knocker. The hesitating, uncertain sound it produced brought Mrs. Hallack to the door in unusual haste. Holding a lamp in one hand and shading her eyes with the other, the widow peered out into the dusk; but when she saw the forlorn and altogether miserable figure of Agnes standing alone on the doorstep, she was not disposed to be either gracious or hospitable.

"Who are you? and what do you want?" she asked, sharply, planting her tall, thin form squarely in the doorway.

"I am Agnes Brandon. Mrs. Ware sent me to you, and said you would give me food and shelter, both of which I sorely stand in need."

"Come in."

Mrs. Hallack turned about, grimly led the way to the little sitting-room, and drew forward the high-backed splint rocking-chair, with its ancient patch-work cushion, her own especial pride and comfort.

"Sit down."

Agnes sank wearily into the inviting chair, and Mrs. Hallack, taking no further notice of

her queer guest, went away, leaving her alone. The poor wanderer was too tired, and too long accustomed to being buffeted by the world, to heed old Judith's forbidding manner. She laid her head back on the cushion for very weariness, and the tears she could no longer repress rolled silently down her wan cheeks. A bright wood fire burned cheerily on the hearth, diffusing a genial warmth throughout the room and shedding a ruddy glow over the rag carpet and neatly-braided rug, whereon Benny lay asleep, stretched at full length, and purring dreamfully. The clock on the mantle ticked monotonously, —a social, home-like sound quite new to Agnes, who felt as if she had strayed into a haven of rest in a dream, and would awaken soon, to find herself again in some desolate byway, with gnawing hunger and pinching cold for companions. Her fears were agreeably dispelled, however, by the entrance of Mrs. Judith, bearing a Japan tea-tray freighted with substantial eatables.

"Here is a cup of tea, bread and butter, and cold ham. Eat."

Mrs. Hallack deposited the tray on the little table near the fire and retired again to the kitchen, that the "poor thing might eat in peace," and to gravely debate in her own mind what reason such a slip of a girl could have for tramping over the country in so outlandish and scandalous a manner.

Agnes was not slow to comply with her grim entertainer's sententiously-delivered command, for she was literally famishing, and never before had she tasted food so delicious.

When she had finished her supper, Agnes felt as if she could sit in the old splint rocker forever, and never care to leave it again. She had heard of cripples who sat for years in their chair, and of people who pitied them. Why, it must be a positive luxury! She drowsily watched the flames leap merrily up the chimney, and flicker weirdly over her faded dress and pale, thin hands. The low, hushful ticking of the clock grew more and more indistinct, and a pleasant sense of rest and security gradually took possession of her whole being.

Mrs. Hallack re-entered to find her strange guest gazing sleepily into the fire and the tray empty. Taking the lamp which she had brought with her from the kitchen, she touched her kindly on the shoulder, and said, "Come," quite as laconically as she had bidden her "eat," and without more ado beckoned Agnes to follow her up-stairs to the only chamber the small house

boasted. A home-made rag-carpet covered the floor, three or four chairs stood primly against the wall. A plump bed, as venerable in appearance as Judith herself, with a blue and white spread and glossily starched valances, a high, brass-handled old fashioned chest of drawers, and a long-legged cherry wash-stand, with a blue earthen pitcher and bowl, comprised the furniture,—the ornamentations being a plaster Ruth, and a framed piece of worsted work, representing some bleary ducks swimming in a green millpond. Mrs. Hallack went to the chest of drawers, took from it a plain, but neatly made and lavender-scented night-gown, and laid it on the nearest chair.

"There, put that on. Go to bed, and go to sleep."

Agnes tried to thank her, but the old woman cut her short.

"You owe me no thanks. There is nothing I would not do for Marguerite Ware. It is she I am serving, not you. I am old, cross-grained, and unsocial; but for her sake I 'd—I 'd shelter the Evil one himself, if he came to me in her name."

Without further explanation she left the room, quite indifferent as to whether it were angel or devil she was befriending. Agnes did not know what to make of her curt hostess' blunt speech, but she bathed her hands and face, undressed, put out the little lamp, and crept into bed. The golden head settled itself on the pillow, and never did sleep come to more tired eyes. She looked like a pretty child grown old before its time. The sweet, sad face seemed never to have known a smile, and who could fancy a song or a laugh ever to have issued from those pale lips? God alone knows why one so young and innocent, yes, innocent,—for she sinned through ignorance, not knowledge,—must be scourged of the world, and made to walk on thorns, turned adrift like a boat abandoned at sea, to float whither it will at the mercy of the winds and the waves. Passion of this sort, at its beginning, men call *love*; to women its sequence, in nearly every instance, is *death*.

So true it is,—

"The river is lost, if the ocean it miss;
If the sea miss the river, what matter? The sea
Is the sea still, forever. Its deep heart will be
Self-sufficing, unconscious of loss, as of yore.
With no diminution of pride it will say,
'I am here, I, the sea! stand aside, and make way!'"

CHAPTER IX.

There is a past which is gone foreyer. But there is a future which is still our own.—F. W. ROBERTSON.

THE sun was shining brightly when Agnes opened her eyes the following morning, and stared blankly around her, amazed to find herself in so strange and, withal, so comfortable a place. But it all came back to her after a moment's reflection,—the dark deed she had meditated down by the willows, the accidental meeting with Marguerite, and her own subsequent reception by Mrs. Hallack. She sprang up and began to huddle on her clothes. Oh, what mere rags they were, soiled and torn, and ill-fitting. With a return to better surroundings, a womanly desire to be neatly attired took possession of her, and here she was with literally nothing decent to put on. Not even a brush with which to smooth her hair.

Live, aye, why should she not live? The veriest worm that crawls the earth has a right to its humble existence, the meanest weed that lifts its ragged head above the dust has a right to its meed of sunshine. The geranium slip attracted her notice. It lay on the bureau, just where she had left it last night, still odorous and unwithered, with little glints of green flecking its bruised stem. "Keep it as a reminder of the dawning of a better day." Could anything so perishable be a symbol of good to one so poor and friendless as herself? She took it up and kissed it tenderly. Just then the door opened and Mrs. Hallack's severe countenance presented itself. But it did not look so severe by daylight, and her mission was certainly a charitable one.

"I have brought you a comb and a brush and a dress, such as it is, which you will be none the worse for using and putting on. Then come to breakfast."

Mrs. Hallack laid the articles mentioned on the bed, turned about with the precision of a field-officer on parade, and marched down-stairs again.

The dress, a blue calico, was by no means fashionably made, but it was clean and whole, and as Mrs. Hallack was thin, and wore her gowns extremely short, Agnes's lithesome figure was not quite lost in it. The sleeves were too long, the neck too high, and the waist too full; yet she contrived to make it do, and was very grateful to the old lady, who, however grim and laconic she might be outwardly, was

thoughtful and kind enough below the surface, and would not, for the world, have treated any one meanly.

It was a very sweet and gentle face which sat opposite dame Judith at breakfast that morning. Once or twice, when the widow's looks were noticeably severe and searching, the ready tears overflowed the blue eyes, and came very near being absorbed in her coffee.

It was not yet mid-day, when a resonant thump of the iron knocker called Mrs. Hallack expeditiously to the front door. Old Caleb stood on the stone step and briefly stated his errand.

"Would Mrs. Hallack please come to The Maples as soon as she conveniently could? Mrs. Ware wished to see her."

"Aye, that I will," rejoined Mrs. Judith, heartily. "I'll be there sooner than you are, Caleb, man, unless you walk faster than you generally do." The old servant departed, and the widow, speedily changing her working day dress for her Sunday bombazine, was shortly on her way to The Maples. "It's about that girl, of course," she thought, as she hastened along, her mind full of the strange event of the previous night. "Poor, pretty creeter! I wonder how on earth Miss Marguerite ever came to find her?"

Mrs. Hallack was right in her conjectures; but it cannot be said that she came away from The Maples very much enlightened as to who the girl was or where she came from. Judith was of an age and disposition not likely to have her morals corrupted by coming in contact with even the most flagitious of love's ostracized victims. Marguerite had only to state her wishes to find in Judith a willing co-helper, and the conclusion finally arrived at was, that Agnes should remain with Mrs. Hallack so long as she proved worthy of that cranky person's hospitality and Mrs. Ware's confidence.

It was certainly a very grave responsibility for a lone old woman to take upon herself, but she remembered Marguerite's words, "You will find a way to do good in your turn some day." Had the day already come, and was this the opportunity given her to do good and commence the payment of her debt of gratitude? But a girl in the house — The thought nearly deprived old Judith of her breath. She returned home, laid aside her bonnet, and, when comfortably enthroned in the capacious splint rocker, she said to the anxious and wondering Agnes, carefully folding meanwhile the skirt of her best black gown back over her knees to keep the heat of the fire from "grayin'" it,—

"You are to stay with me, young woman, until you are able to find a better home; and if you are handy and good-tempered, I don't mind havin' you around, though I don't like company, as a general thing. But I'm gettin' old, and the evenin's are long and lonely with nobody but Benny to talk to; and he's gettin' old, too, and likes the mat and the fire more and more every day. To morrow Mrs. Ware will send you the friend she promised you;" here the dame's aged eyes twinkled humorously, and she gave a fresh fold to her gown. "As I said afore, I am an old woman, set in my ways and easily put out; but I'll make you as comfortable as I know how; and I am not sure but what I may come to be fond of you, as you seem to have no temper worth speakin' of to worret, and no flirtin', hity-tity airs to aggravate me."

"Oh, I can't begin to—"

"Well, I don't want you to begin until I've hal my say," tersely interrupted Judith, bringing Agnes's attempted expression of thanks to a dead stop. "You may consider the up-stairs chamber yours for awhile, at any rate, and I want you to get that hunger-look out of your eyes as soon as ever you can. A starvation pinch is something *I* never had on my face yet, and I can't abide the sight of it in any one, much less will I have it under my own roof."

Not being allowed to speak, what did Agnes do but drop that curly, golden head of hers on the old woman's bony knees and burst into a passion of tears.

"I know how you feel," continued Judith, consolingly, taking no credit to herself whatever. "I did the very same thing when she was kind to me — when she saved my boy, and made my life and his a joy and a blessing."

"She is so good, and I am so unworthy of her kindness," sobbed Agnes, with her face still hidden in the folds of the widow's best gown.

"That's for Miss Marguerite to say. *I* never question her judgment."

"You do not?"

"An ignorant body like me? No. When she speaks, I listen; and what she asks me to do, I do."

"Did Mrs. Ware tell you about me?" with a little scared catching of her breath.

"She told me you were a friendless orphan girl, homeless and unhappy. Was there anything more to tell?"

"No; nothing more. Please try to love me a little. Nobody ever has since my mother died. Nobody at all."

"Poor child! you must have been starved in more ways than one."

"The other was not love. I don't know what it was; but surely it was not love."

"What other, child?"

She blushed, and again hid her face on the bony knees. "Mrs. Tully's."

"And who is Mrs. Tully?"

"The lady where I lodged, a long way from this."

"A stingy sort of person, I should say, and mean, too, since both her love and her lodgings were of a very poor quality. There, don't cry. We must think about riggin' you up some decent clothes. Miss Marguerite thought of that, and furnished the wherewith to do it. *She* never forgets anything. You must get over lookin' so peaked and scared-like; it's not natural at your age. Plenty of bread and butter is the tonic you need, and you will soon be as happy and merry as a cricket."

"Happy and merry? Oh, you don't know what you are saying; and you ought not to trust me, indeed you ought not, for I—I am not at all good."

"What Miss Marguerite trusts, I am free to say I am not afraid of," stoutly maintained old Judith. "A pretty to do, that I must presume to turn up my nose when she says there is no occasion for it. You have cried your wits into a snarl, and almost put me out of temper. Tie a bit of something over your head and take a run in the sunshine. If you go along by the pines, you will see nothing more terrible than a bird or a squirrel, and the walk will brighten you up."

"The pines!" Agnes lifted her head quickly. "Oh, no; I could not go by the pines. They are so dark and still, and always the same. I don't like them."

"Then go to Chestnut Hill; the little path at the back of the house leads directly to it, and from that point you can see all Somerton. Bless me, but you've a fine shawl, whatever else you have n't got."

"It is Mrs. Ware's. She gave it to me last evening, as I was so cold and the night air so chilly."

"Just like her. Miss Marguerite never thinks of herself."

"And her husband, Mr. Ware, is he at Somerton now?"

Mrs. Hallack at once became steel-trappy and laconic.

"The least said about him the better. He

seldom or never comes here, and good riddance, say I, to a bad bargain."

"Then you do not like him?"

"That's neither here nor there," snapped old Judith.

"He was never her equal, for all his grand airs; and it was she who was the making of him, too, such as he is," tossing her grizzly gray head with lofty and uncompromising disdain. "Now, do you run away, and never mention *Mr.* Ware's name to me again as long as you live."

Agnes most willingly gave the promise, and her heart was immeasurably the lighter for knowing that Maurice Ware never came to Somerton, and that she was forbidden to speak his name.

Once again alone in the mellow October sunshine, she marvelled greatly at the change which had not only wonderfully beautified the face of nature, but changed the whole tenor of her thoughts as well. How strange it seemed to have a home to go to when gathering darkness made everything human seek shelter, and a place of rest for the night.

So this was Chestnut Hill, and rightly named. Agnes looked around her with a far-away expression of peace and thankfulness. The earth, all strewn with dead leaves and yawning burrs, afforded splendid foraging grounds for any number of predacious squirrels, which scampered up trees and down with their load of brown nuts, and through the dry, rustling leaves, without appearing to be in the least afraid of her.

Patter, patter fell the frost-cut burrs; gaping wide and empty, they laughed at her high up over her head and low down under her feet. Every puff of wind brought with it a shower of leaves and glossy brown nuts, a kind of autumnal sound quite unfamiliar to her ears. Muffled up in her warm shawl, she sat down on a convenient stone, and began to wonder if it were really true that she was Agnes Brandon, and if the little old house nestling at the foot of the hill was really to be her home. She was as rich now as the squirrels, and no longer envied them their snug nests, nor their luscious store of winter food.

She returned to the house to find the inviting tea-table neatly spread for two, and Mrs. Hallack placidly knitting, as she dreamily swayed herself to and fro in her favorite rocking-chair. On the hearth a britannia teapot was steaming away at a prodigiously social rate, while on the table were tea-biscuits and seed-cakes, a golden pat of butter of Mrs. Judith's own choice make, delicious cream, and a bit of currant-

jelly in an elegantly flowered dish. To Agnes it seemed like a glimpse of Paradise, and not to be grateful, she fancied, would be worse than confessing one's self to be a heathen.

After tea, Mrs. Hallack watched Agnes wash the dishes and tidy up the room, with marked approval depicted on her countenance. "She is handy, and when she gets over feeling strange, it will be sort o' pleasant to have the girl around," thought the dame, complacently. A meditative silence of some minutes followed, then came the leading question: "Can you sew?" asked as only old Judith could ask it.

"I can finish off almost everything. Bodies and sleeves, principally. I basted for Miss Smike—that was when I first began. I made sleeves for Madam Doolie, and flannel bathing and gymnasium suits for the clothing-houses. The dress-makers did not teach me anything entirely, only parts. But I can do plain sewing, and make button-holes, real nice," replied Agnes, recounting her accomplishments with great pride.

"And you made your livin' in that way?"

"Yes. Sometimes I earned as much as thirty cents a day."

"Gracious! And boarded yourself, I suppose?"

"We always had to do that."

"No wonder you were half starved and half clad. Well, I'm thankful to say nobody, man or woman, works for thirty cents a day in Somerton."

"Girls never go wrong in the country, do they?" asked Agnes, lowering her eyes and softly stroking Benny's silky fur.

"Indeed they do, a plenty of them; vain, sassy creeters, who think of nothing but dress and paradin' the streets. You are not one to be easily spoiled, I'm sure, for a girl that can wash a dish as it *ought* to be washed, is never in much danger of goin' wrong. There's a deal of savin' grace in knowin' how to work. It's idleness that keeps the devil busy and prisons full. Finishin' off is all very well; but give me a girl who knows how to keep a house in order, and I'll show you one worth the havin', with no cotton-lace and fly-away airs about her," concluded the old lady, settling back in her chair and resuming her knitting in the most dignified manner.

Agnes sat looking pensively in the fire until a resounding knock on the outer door recalled her to herself, and so startled her that she came near uttering a cry of alarm.

"It's your friend arrived, I do believe; though it was n't expected until to-morrow," said the widow, speaking in the neuter gender. "Yes. It is your friend. I thought so when I heard the wagon stop." She opened the door, and Agnes saw two men without, bearing between them a handsome American sewing-machine.

"For Miss Agnes Brandon," said the foremost man, consulting his memorandum.

"For me?" cried Agnes, breathless.

"For you, if so be you are Miss Brandon. Paid for, and delivered. Please sign your name to this receipt."

Agnes did as she was requested, scarcely conscious of what she was doing, and saw the men depart like one in a dream.

Mrs. Hallack closed the door with a sort of triumphant bang. "Now, what do you think of your friend?"

"I think it just too good to be true. It surely cannot be for me; there must be some mistake, because nothing pleasant ever happens to me."

"That is because you have never before known a Marguerite Ware."

"And she has so little reason to be kind to me; no reason at all, in fact," protested Agnes.

"Well, let that be as it may, she *is* kind to you; and it's a sin for you, or any one, to fly in the face of good fortune. There are no more button-holes to make, no more stitching. All you have to do is to get the hang of the new way of doin' it, to the sparin' of eyes and fingers and a killin' pain in the side."

"I can never thank her, I can never be grateful enough; but I can live, as she bade me, and in some way, perhaps, I may be able, in a measure, to atone for the past. Yes, from this hour I mean to live, and that, too, with all my might."



CHAPTER X.

Sweet is pleasure after pain.—DRYDEN.

WITHIN a week, Agnes had arranged her small possessions, and was as busy as a bee. Mrs. Graham, the mistress of Cedarcroft, and Mrs. Hurst, the Episcopal minister's lady, had called, and both left liberal orders for plain sewing. Mrs. Ware, of course, had suggested the above line of procedure to those ladies, for she knew their patronage would insure Agnes no lack of work. A modicum of damp earth in a cracked teacup was the best Agnes had so far been able to do for the geranium-slip. She stood

looking at it one day, about a month after her arrival at Somerton, in a disappointed kind of way.

"Blighted,—like my life. It must have been transplanted at the wrong time, or been chilled by the frost. Nothing but dead, yellow leaves, that fall off at a touch, and show no sign of renewed vitality."

She pulled off a dry stem, and, lo! crowding from beneath it, was the germ of a tender, new leaflet—a speck of emerald freshness bravely pushing its tiny growth into the light. Agnes clapped her hands, delighted at the discovery.

"Ah, I see! The old, dead leaves of want and wretchedness fall off to make room for the sweet, compassionate buds of hope and contentment. It lives, my flower, it lives; and so will I!"

It was wonderful, the effect this trifling circumstance had upon Agnes. She recovered health and spirits, the color came back to her cheeks, the brightness to her eyes. She took pride in arranging little feminine trifles about her room, and was exceedingly nice about her dress. She had excellent taste; was neat in doing, and skilful in contriving various new styles of trimming, so that her services were constantly in demand by the Somerton fashionables, who really did not know how they could get along without that handy little Agnes Brandon. This, of course, was very pleasant to Agnes, and, in spite of her miserable past, youth's smile and light-heartedness crept back to her beautiful face; and once she caught herself singing, without being at all aware of the magnitude of her indiscretion.

The sound fairly electrified old Judith, who turned round and stared at the girl in utter astonishment. "Why, I didn't know you could sing like that, child!" Agnes stopped, with a kind of guilty suddenness, and it was like the hushing of a nightingale when its song is just commenced.

"I'd like to be taught something," she said, bashfully. "I am earning money enough now to afford it; don't you think so? I can neither write nor spell very well. I know more about music than I do anything else, except finishing off."

"Where did you learn to sing so sweetly? Even Benny knows it's not a voice of the common sort."

"Benny is the most partial puss in the whole world," stooping to smooth his soft coat. "Old Paglioni, the Italian street musician, taught me

all I know of music. It was before my mother died. He was our neighbor, and as poor as we were; but he did love music. He gave me lessons for a year, and thought to make a great singer of me, poor, infatuated old man! But he died one night, all alone, with no one to give him so much as a cup of water, and I never had another teacher."

"It's a shame for you not to know how to spell; for, though I'm but poorly educated myself, I set a store by it in others, and it's what I worked my fingers to the bone for to give my boy. There is Lucretia Briggs; she is considerable of a cripple, and has a deal of trouble with her spine off and on; but she has a powerful turn for larnin'. French, music, and writin', and I don't know what all beside. She has a private class who are quite young ladies. It was Miss Marguerite got her started. I call her Miss Marguerite, because it's the girl-name by which we Somerton people have always known and loved her. Lucretia, now I think of it, is just the person for you to go to."

The idea pleased Agnes immensely, and she lost no time in seeing Miss Briggs. Very soon thereafter she became her private pupil; for, said she, with a conscious blush, "I am very ignorant, and I'd not like to be with a class of clever girls, who would laugh at me for knowing so little."

Every week-day evening Agnes spent two hours with Miss Briggs, and her progress, especially in music, was remarkably rapid, and her delight knew no bounds when a little cabinet piano was added to her luxuries. It was the gift of Mrs. Graham's set, that lady remarking ambiguously, "that Agnes's musical talents covered a multitude of sins," alluding, no doubt, to the mystery which surrounded the girl's past, and as she sang in the Episcopal choir without remuneration, why, the church ladies could well afford to be generous. Both Mrs. Hurst and Marguerite warmly seconded the proposition, and the result of their so doing was the piano.

Lewis was coming home at Christmas, and the joy of his mother can be better imagined than described. The little bedroom adjoining the sitting-room had been fitted up for his use, and was in as trim order as hands could make it. Christmas-eve found everything in readiness—the hearth cleanly swept, the curtains drawn, the lamp freshly trimmed, the fire burning brightly, and the clock soberly ticking away the minutes that would soon end the life of the old and proclaim the birth of the new year.

The night settled down cold and blustering. Random snow-flakes filled the air, driven hither and thither by every fresh gust of wind. Mrs. Hallack had gone to visit a sick neighbor, leaving the house to the care of Agnes and Benny.

Who that had seen her down there by the willows, with that look on her face of ashy despair, could believe that this delicate girl, sitting in the rosy glow of the woodfire-light, was the same forlorn, homeless, starving Agnes who had knocked at Mrs. Hallack's door, and craved her pity and her charity but three short months before. The faintly-flushed cheeks were like the heart of a sea-shell, the large, lovely blue eyes were full of a tender light, and her amber hair, all waves and eddies of gold, "A thing to be braided, and jewelled, and kissed," clustered in soft, silky abundance around a forehead as white as snow. Her dress of dark blue cashmere became her perfectly, and fitted her slender figure like a glove. Sitting there alone in the quiet, cosy room, she looked as sweet a picture of innocent girlhood as ever blessed a fireside.

The book she had been reading lay neglected in her lap, and her eyes were absently fixed on the flickering blaze. What did she see in the ruddy flames? Benny came, sat down beside her chair, and looked up inquiringly in her face. Why did he assume that judge-like attitude, and stare at her with his round, owlish eyes?

"You don't know what a life I've had, Benny," she said, a low, contrite sort of sadness in her voice, as if she were speaking to a human being and afraid of incurring merited censure. "An awful life! You don't know how dreadfully cold and hungry I was last Christmas-eve. I had no bread to eat and no fire to keep me warm."

"Mew, mew!" replied Benny, dolefully, giving his sympathetic tail a compassionate twirl.

"You do not see what I see in the firelight. You do not hear what I hear in the howling wind. You do not feel what I feel when the snow dashes against the window-panes, and night flings his black banner over the storm-swept earth."

"Mew, mew!" repeated Benny, still more pityingly, springing into her lap, and rubbing his back caressingly against her chin.

"You don't love me any the less though, do you? But I'll not tell you the rest; it's bad and wicked, and you may not like me, if you were to know."

She smiled sadly, and the spoiled puss thought

it no more than his due to be hugged to so fair a bosom and kissed by so sweet a mouth.

It was certainly very comfortable in that bird's-nest of a room. Mrs. Hallack's easy-chair, with her knitting on the little stand beside it, stood in its accustomed place. Bouquets of autumn leaves artistically arranged, wreaths of holly and cedar above the mantle-piece, and occupying the place of honor, standing on a black walnut bracket near the east window, was the geranium, now a flourishing plant that had long ago outgrown the cracked teacup, and had slips to spare of its own. Marguerite's first gift, and so dearly prized; not for all the money in the world would she have parted with it. And Marguerite's life, too, had missed of happiness. Love, or its shadow, had shipwrecked them both, but on widely different seas. Agnes sighed somewhat discontentedly. Was this to be *all* her life? Was she always to be at the beck and call of others? When Mrs. Hurst had asked her to come over to the parsonage and play a few simple airs for the children, she had gladly done so. Only last week, she had received a rather tart message from Mrs. Graham about Miss Iva's dress, which must be finished in time for the grand New Year reception at Cedarcroft. How strange it was, that she, who had been so hardly treated of fortune in the past, should feel a passing slight so keenly. "I am wicked and rebellious still," she mused. "I fancy a cause for dissatisfaction when really no cause exists. I am quite too vain and oversensitive — I who have been lashed with scorpions and stung by all manner of stinging things. But, at my worst, I did not sell myself,— never, never, never!"

The words were uttered with a kind of cry, the piteousness of which startled her as much as it did Benny, who sprang from her lap in a highly offended way and looked at her reproachfully.

Agnes went to the window and drew aside the curtain. How cold and dark it was without, how warm and bright within. The snow had begun to whiten the ground and whirl spitefully through the wintry air. She shivered, dropped the curtain, and returned again to the fire. A single loud bang of the venerable knocker aroused her from a new train of thought, and she hurried to the door. A boy, muffled to the eyes, thrust a package into her hands, and hustled off up the street as fast as his active feet and a nipping atmosphere could urge him. The package was very plainly directed, "Miss

Agnes Brandon," in a lady's dainty hand. A Christmas present! It was the first she had ever received. Her eager fingers tore open the parcel. A beautiful writing-desk, with stationery and everything complete, and three pieces of new music. With Mrs. Hurst's kind remembrance and the good wishes of the season. Another knock at the door; another boy and two more parcels. Agnes began to believe that she was bewitched, or that some good fairy was abroad in the land bent on loading her with gifts. An elegantly bound copy of Campbell's "Pleasures of Hope," and a dear little mink muff, with the card of Mrs. and Miss Iva Graham attached. Agnes could not contain her joy.

"Oh, how lovely, how good and thoughtful of them, and what an ungrateful creature I am. Only a moment ago I was thinking myself ill-used, and now—gracious! another knock!" She flew to the door. A very small boy, with a red comforter tied over his ears, and carrying something quite bulky carefully wrapped in a shawl, confronted her.

"If you please, I'm little Teddy Jones; and Miss Briggs said I was to give you Beauty 'cause you liked him, and he's to be your Christmas gift."

Little Teddy put the bird-cage containing Beauty in her hand and vanished, as if mightily afraid old Santa Claus might whisk around the nearest corner and reach the lowly abode of the paternal Jones before him, for to his youthful imagination Kriss Kingle, with prodigious strides, walked right over the house-tops, leaving his favors wherever good little boys abided, and reindeer, drawing heavily-laden sledges, were prancing here and there all over the storm-swept hills.

Benny eyed the contents of the last package with an ominous lengthening of his back and a snaky wave of his supple tail. Agnes quickly put Beauty out of his reach, sternly admonishing him, pampered pet though he was, that canary birds were not for his eating, and a fearful punishment awaited him if he dared to so much as lay a murderous paw on the cage, or even lift towards it a longing eye.

A knock, no matter how thunderous, would not have surprised Agnes now. She was rather expectant than otherwise, and when old Caleb's mittened hand essayed a fumbling rap, she arose to admit him quite calmly. "Mrs. Ware's kind regards, and she sent you this," said Caleb, briefly, depositing a huge parcel in the entry,

and taking his departure with the promptitude generally ascribed to Kriss Kingle himself. A pretty cloth cloak, flannel under-wear, and a silk purse containing a generous donation in money. Caleb's footsteps had not ceased to echo on the frozen path before Agnes had untied the brown paper wrappings, and was crying very softly, just because she was so happy, or so something she did not know exactly what.

Mrs. Hallack remained away so long, Agnes began to suspect she was in the secret, and had timed her visit to the sick neighbor with a view to having the presents arrive in her absence.

Agnes spread her newly-acquired treasures out on the table, and thought she could never be done admiring them. Beauty, encouraged by the social light and grateful warmth after his cold journey in the freezing December air, burst into a bewildering flood of song, to the infinite disgust of Benny and the intense delight of Agnes.

"Sing, you pretty creature, sing!" she cried, joyfully. "Sing until my heart catches the glory of your song and I forget the horrid phantom of the past! My geranium, too, grows strong and tall, and it bloomed to-day for the first time. Thank God, I've done nothing to turn from me the love of a bird, or fade the bloom of a flower! But I do wish Aunt Judith would come;"—she had gotten into the habit of calling the old woman "Aunt Judith" by the merest slip of the tongue;—"for it would be so much nicer if she were here to share my pleasure with me."

She ran to the door, thinking she heard Mrs. Judith's step outside, and, in her heedless haste, fairly ran into the arms of a tall gentleman so buried in coat-collar and fur-cap that only his eyes were visible. The stranger was just in the act of lifting the iron knocker when the sudden opening of the door accelerated his entrance with more force than elegance. Agnes sprang back, a cry of terror escaping her lips. She could not even yet see a stranger, well-dressed and of gentlemanly appearance, without experiencing a spasm of inward fear.

The individual so unexpectedly and so precipitously admitted hastened to reassure her.

"I am Lewis Hallack. I had not thought to reach home until to-morrow, but was so fortunate as to get away a day sooner than I had hoped to do."

"I beg your pardon. I—I did not know. Please walk in," she said, confusedly. "Mrs. Hallack will soon be home. It was to see if

she were not coming that induced me to go to the door."

Lewis laid aside his overcoat and cap, and seated himself in the chair she drew to the fire. Agnes rapidly recovered from her momentary embarrassment, for Lewis began to talk about the merest commonplaces,—the weather, the state of the roads, and the people he had formerly known at Somerton, wondering all the while, however, where his mother ever came to find so lovely a companion. Mrs. Hallack, at best, was but an indifferent scribe, and in consequence her letters to her son had been brief, more from necessity than inclination. Never but once had she mentioned Agnes's name, and then only in a vague and uninteresting way.

"She is beautiful, and no mistake," thought Lewis, casting a furtive glance of admiration at the fair, sweet face turned partly from him, and still glowing like a rose at the recollection of that awkward encounter in the entry. Mr. Hallack had greatly improved in appearance during the six months of his absence, and in conversation and bearing was every inch the gentleman.

"I am Agnes Brandon," she said, finally, answering his look of respectful inquiry.

"Oh, yes; I remember now. Mother wrote me something about it. But I did not suppose—"

The sentence was never finished. The "suppose" died the death of many suppositions, for at the moment Mrs. Hallack entered the room, and was clasped in the arms of her son.

"Oh, my dear, dear boy, how glad I am to see you! and to think you came while I was away. Agnes, child, put another stick of wood on the fire. This is Agnes, the girl I have with me, and a great comfort she is, too," cried the old mother, nearly beside herself with mingled surprise and joy.

"We are already very well acquainted," laughed Lewis, "for she admitted me so unceremoniously as to make the introduction both prompt and conclusive."

He then related the manner in which they had met at the door, and all three laughed heartily. The affair was so ludicrous, and to laugh is not difficult when one is happy.

"These are your Christmas presents, I presume?" he remarked, after a pause, going up to the table and examining the pretty articles thereon one by one.

"Oh, I forgot mine!" exclaimed Mrs. Hal-

lack, producing from the lowest depth of her long pocket a little silvery, satin-paper box, which she opened with great care. "Nothing very costly; but I know you will like 'em. There!" and she held up for general inspection a dainty bunch of white marguerites.

"Oh, the darlings! And you thought of me, too, Aunt Judith!" nestling them into her bosom after she had kissed them a dozen times.

"I love them, also, for the sake of their name," said Lewis, his thoughts recurring to how much he owed the woman who bore it. He took up the book. "'The Pleasures of Hope:' a good title." Iva Graham's card fell from between the leaves and fluttered to the floor. He picked it up, replaced it, and hastily laid the book down again. Then he went to the window and looked out; observed that it was a stormy night, which made it seem all the more pleasant to be at home; adding, with a nervous plunge of his hand through his reddish-brown hair, showing a mental condition of disquiet which the prosaic nature of his remark did not warrant, "I've been travelling all day, and have had no dinner. Would it be asking too much of one's mother to give a fellow a cup of tea, served here by the fire in good, old-fashioned style?"

"How remiss of me! Why didn't I think of it before?" Agnes was out of the room in an instant, without waiting to hear the old lady's reply; and the commotion raised a moment thereafter among the pots and pans in the kitchen denoted quite conclusively that active preparations were in progress for the serving of a substantial meal.

"She is right helpful, and saves me many a step," said Mrs. Hallack, with an approving nod towards the door through which Agnes had disappeared. "I don't know what I would do without her."

"And she is as pretty as a picture. Who the deuce is she, mother? Did she drop from the clouds, or, like another Undine, arise from the river?"

"I don't know. Miss Marguerite sent her to me; and I asked no questions."

"Certainly not. But she is very lovely."

"Mind, no nonsense, Lewis! She is a good girl, so far as I know. None of your flirtin', deceitful, fly-away sort. But you're too poor to think of —"

"Hold hard, mother; you're going too fast. Agnes is beautiful; but I'm beauty-proof, for I've seen another star, in a higher heaven than hers,—so high, in fact, that I never hope to

reach it in the brief span of man's life. But I may worship from afar, unrebuked, may I not? And we are permitted to look at the sun though it blinds us, and long for that which is beyond our feeble ken."

"And who is there too good for my son, I'd like to know?" tossing her head with motherly indignation. "There's not a handsomer nor a better in three counties, if I do say it myself."

"Ah, mother, you are inconsistent. Did you not say but a moment ago that I was too poor to mate with a star?"

"I said nothing about a star; and I don't believe in star sweethearts, anyway. A man that has a tongue in his head, and can't win the girl he wants, is a poor affair; that's my mind about it."

"I merely mentioned the existence of my star to set your mind at rest in regard to your golden-haired protégé," smiled Lewis, taking up the muff and twirling it around on his hand.

Agnes brought in the tea just in time to save Aunt Judith the trouble of replying. The girl did indeed look charming, and the old woman noticed it with a sigh, for where lived the man who could see her and not love her?

It was late when the supper things were cleared away, and Lewis proposed that they should sit up until the village chimes rang in the Christmas morn.

"So we will," acquiesced Mrs. Hallack, quite taken with the idea. "Just hand me my shawl, Agnes; I feel a rheumatic pain in my shoulder."

Aunt Judith sat up, it is true, but her efforts to keep awake were an absolute failure. In ten minutes she was comfortably nodding in her chair, leaving Lewis and Agnes to entertain themselves or remain unentertained.

"The wind seems to be rising," casually observed Lewis, as a fitful gust rattled the sash and howled dismally around the corner of the house. "I hope there are no homeless people abroad to-night."

"So do I, for I know what it is to be homeless."

The sweet, humble simplicity of her words touched him deeply.

"I cannot bring myself to believe that you, so fair and small, and so like a child, were ever homeless."

"Oh, but I was. I never had a Christmas before this. I mean one that was not like every other day. And after my mother died, I had no home at all."

"No home! You were indeed unfortunate."

"I was only fifteen when I lost my mother, and since then I've lived anyhow. I owe all the good that's ever come to me to Marguerite," looking down lovingly at the flowers, and the grateful tears crowding their way through the golden-brown lashes. "But for her, I dare not think where I might be to-night."

"Nor I."

Lewis got up and took a turn or two about the room. Presently he stopped, and from sheer vandalism pulled a leaf from the geranium, remarking, indifferently, that it was a fine, thrifty plant.

"Yes. Marguerite gave it to me. The parent stalk grew on her baby's grave. It was the merest slip then; but it grew, as she said it would, and is like my life. I love to think that it is like my life — a dead leaf here and there, a blighted bud or two, but not *all* a ruin."

"What a strange, self-accusing girl you are."

"I do not wish any one to think me better than I am."

"And therein you differ from almost everybody else, for most people spend half their lives trying to make the world believe them better than they really are."

Agnes did not reply, and he went on.

"Did you know Mrs. Ware before you came here?"

"I saw her once three years ago."

"She is a noble woman."

"There are none like her in the whole world."

"True. Marguerite is one who 'outstrips all praise and makes it halt behind her.'"

"I could scarcely write at all when Miss Briggs took me in hand. I never wrote but one letter in my life," blushing rosily at the recollection of her one epistolary effort; "and I was two hours writing six of the most dreadfully spelled words that ever were seen. I spelled secret with a k, and been with an i, and no e's."

"Shocking! And your punctuation and your syntax were as much out of joint and as unique, I suppose, as your orthography?"

"Every bit; and I did not know a thing about capitals."

"Miss Briggs will correct all that, I dare say, and finish you off in fine style."

"Finish me off?" with a startled glance. "Oh, I was thinking of sleeves and bodies."

The clock on the mantle pointed to half-past eleven. Beauty had tucked his golden head under his wing and was fast asleep. Aunt Judith's measured breathing deepened into a

sound suspiciously near a snore, and Benny alternately dozed and purred and blinked at the glowing coals. Lewis replenished the fire, and unconsciously their tones became lower and graver. The wind arose and fell with a dirge-like cadence, and the snow beat at the windows. Midnight. Hark! A bell; another and another: they were ringing in the happy Christmas-day. "Good-night," said each and every one. Agnes took her lamp and went up-stairs. The bells were still ringing, and the sound re-echoed weirdly among the hills. She knelt down beside her bed and prayed, "Lord, make me worthy of my blessings; make me grateful for Thy mercies."

She fell asleep with the tears yet warm on her cheeks, unheeding the wild rush of the warring winds, that shook the old house from roof to foundation-stone, and bore on its wings the mystical transition, sweet and restful, which has for its counterpart Sleep's grim twin brother, Death.

CHAPTER XI.

Dying notes,

That fall as soft as snow on the sea,
And melt in the heart as instantly!
And the passionate strain that, deeply going,
Refines the bosom it trembles through,
As the musk-wind, over the waters blowing,
Ruffles the wave, but sweetens it too!

MOORE.

CHRISTMAS morning dawned bleak and sunless, with a leaden sky above and a snow-clad earth beneath; but the unfavorable state of the weather did not hinder the Christmas festivities from going on as usual.

The elegant mansion of the Grahams was filled with company, and there was no end to the merry-making. It was very quiet at The Maples; but there, too, the holly and the mistletoe were in their time-honored places. The Hallacks discussed their Christmas turkey with the utmost relish, and were as happy as their richer neighbors. If the young man's bosom harbored any sad thoughts, he wisely kept them to himself, and delighted his mother with his lively conversation and evident appreciation of the humble joys and comforts of home. In the evening, Lewis said, as he opened the little piano that stood in solemn state between the two sitting-room windows,—

"You must favor me with a song, Miss

Brandon; otherwise, I'll not be quite sure but that both Signor Paglioni and Miss Briggs have conspired at different periods of your life to unduly flatter you."

Agnes seated herself at the piano and straight-way proceeded to dispel Mr. Hallack's doubts, singing, in a rich contralto voice, Longfellow's beautiful lines,—

The day is done, and the darkness
Falls from the wing of Night
As a feather is wafted downward
From an eagle in his flight.

I see the lights of the village
Gleam through the rain and the mist,
And a feeling of sadness comes o'er me,
That my soul cannot resist:

A feeling of sadness and longing,
That is not akin to pain,
And resembles sorrow only
As the mist resembles rain.

"The old Italian was right," applauded Lewis, warmly. "With that faultless voice, you might have made your fortune."

"Oh, no; I never could sing in public," she replied, allowing her fingers to wander idly over the keys. "I like to sing, but not for everybody."

Further conversation was interrupted by the arrival of a servant from Cedarcroft, with a note from Miss Iva to Agnes requesting her presence at the great house the next day. They were to have dancing for the amusement of the children during the afternoon, and in the evening an impromptu entertainment for the pleasure of the grown-up people. Would Miss Brandon kindly come and play for them? Agnes, of course, replied in the affirmative. It was arranged that Lewis should come for her in the evening, and as early as two o'clock the succeeding day she set out, walking the short half mile that lay between the Hallack cottage and the Graham mansion. The crisp snow beneath her feet gave forth a pleasant sound as she tripped along, thinking of the many nice things this Christmas had brought her.

"I must thank Miss Ida for the book, 'The Pleasures of Hope,'—what a happy selection! —and Mrs. Graham for the muff," burying her little nose in the warm fur, for the frost was impertinently reddening that exposed feature, and pinching her cheeks a rosy red.

There were a good half dozen little Grahams of all ages, sex, and sizes, and these, with about twenty more, representing the genteel baby-blood of the best Somerton families, seized upon

Agnes the moment she appeared, and bore her off in triumph to the nursery to see their Christmas-tree. They stuffed her pocket with cakes and sugar-plums, pressed upon her no end of nuts, fruit, and gimcracks, and were so generous and so noisy that she was nearly deafened by their uproar and driven half distracted by their liberality; but she entered heartily into the fun, and played and sang the "Three blind mice" with a brilliancy that brought down the house, the whole delighted troop—boys and girls, big and little—joining in the chorus with more energy and power of lungs than musical proficiency. Then they must have a dance. Oh, yes; and Agnes must play a waltz. Such tiny, tiny feet as they were, twinkling over the floor, if not strictly in time to the music, at least in unbounded glee.

Then there were games and mother-goose rhymes and story-telling. The "three blind mice" over again, and a grand finale, suggested by Master Eddie Graham, who had been to a minstrel performance on one memorable occasion never to be effaced from that young gentleman's retentive memory; winding up with a superb "Walk around," which embraced the whole company. And immediately thereafter the playroom was invaded by an army of nurse-maids, who bore off their respective charges amid cries and kicks and yells of defiance. Peace reigned at last in the deserted nursery. The Christmas-tree, shorn of many of its treasures, had served its purpose, and the cedrine breath of its dying scented the room. Iva came fluttering in, looking exceedingly lovely, and the very embodiment of high spirits. She was a sparkling brunette, cherry-lipped, dark-eyed, and chestnut-haired, with a nose that had a saucy turn upward, and just suited the charming, piquant face and gay, vivacious manner. Her dress of ruby silk, handsomely trimmed with old point, fitted her like a riding-habit, enhancing her dark beauty, and showing off to advantage her graceful, girlish figure. Iva was her father's darling, and had her own way pretty much with every one; fortunately, that way was, generally speaking, a very exemplary one, otherwise she surely would have been spoiled. As it was, however, everybody, friends and dependents alike, declared her to be a remarkably "nice" girl, and certainly Agnes thought so with a fervency that nearly amounted to religion.

"Now, I know you must be tired," said the fairy, with a child's look and laugh, though she

was twenty-two, and as tall as Agnes. "Those dreadful children would drive me wild in an hour. Come and have a cup of coffee. I dare say you can find a quiet nook somewhere in the library, and if you have a taste for the horrible there is Doré's *Inferno*—illustrations that would give even Dante himself the nightmare."

Agnes gladly accompanied Miss Graham to the library, where she left her for an hour's rest, and returned to her guests; a servant brought the coffee, and Agnes was soon deeply immersed in the magnificently hideous productions of Doré's pencil.

Cedarcroft was one blaze of light; the noble conservatories were thrown open, rare exotics lined the grand staircase, everywhere there was splendor, luxury, and a lavish expenditure of wealth. Among it all Agnes was no more than a mere piece of furniture, patronized simply because she was useful, and could, by her singing, contribute to the enjoyment of Mrs. Graham's fine friends. Clarence Sloper, Iva's cousin, an exquisite of the first water, and worth a cool half million, put up his eyeglass when he saw her sitting alone in the library, with her golden head bent low over the wonderful pages of the *Inferno*, and drawled from beneath the feeblest yellow mustache that ever graced a masculine lip,—

"Dev-il-ish pretty girl, by Jove! A regular Hebe. Appears rather tame, though. Dress-maker, I suppose, or something. Looks sort of millinerish."

He was just going to speak to her,—such a course being entirely in keeping with his insolent soliloquy, and still more insolent stare,—when clever little Iva laid a forbidding hand upon his arm, and promptly countermarched Master Clarence back to the drawing-room.

"You are one of those, cousin mine, of whom one might say, 'I am my father's only son, and only daughter, too,' so I'll take you in hand, you poor orphaned thing, and teach you a lesson which you sadly need. Will you never learn, Clarence, to be a—gentleman?"

"Eh, what, 'pon honor!"

"There is no honor about it. What were you staring at my friend so far? and she unaware of your presence and unconscious of your impertinence."

"Your friend?"

"Yes; my friend. And you will please remember it in future."

"You are awful hard on a fellow, you really are."

"I have to be, because you are such a fool, Clary."

In his way young Sloper was very fond of his cousin Iva, but it was such a ludicrous way, and he such an insipid, pretty piece of male conceit, that his "way" always threw Iva into fits of uncontrollable merriment. He complained that she was eternally laughing at or lecturing him, one or the other; and in that respect he did not go far of the truth. Iva would say, quite soberly, "My dearest Cousin Sloper has but one idea, and that a wrong one; so I am obliged to exercise great severity towards him."

It was only by the merest chance that she happened to discover Clarence while engaged in the laudable occupation of making a note of Agnes's "fine points." Sloper affected to be horsey on all occasions, and hence the asperity of her lecture. He knew he was "in for it," and felt horribly ill at ease. Iva did not disappoint him.

"Oh, perennial greenness! Will your verdant mind never ripen sufficiently to enable you to tell the difference between a goshawk and a nightingale?" she said, patting sympathetically Clarence's insignificant head. "Brains, my dear boy, brains is what you need; and if they were purchasable, or to be had for money, I'd advise you to invest a hundred thousand dollars or so in the commodity without delay."

Clarence frowned.

"You are outrageously tantalizing, Iva. I won't stand it."

"Sit down, then, if you think you would be more comfortable."

"By heavens! you are a—a—positively insulting."

"That's because you looked a whole volume of insults at my nightingale."

"Oh, well, hang it! Who knew she was your nightingale?"

"She is here at my invitation. I am responsible for any ill that may befall her while under my father's roof. She is poor, and has no one to protect her; and when doves are about, one has reason to keep a sharp eye on the hawks. The mere fact of one circling overhead, and sailing rapaciously around every time she ventured out, would make the swooping down simply a question of honor,—an article which you do not possess to any alarming extent,—and so frighten her that never again would my dove venture near Cedarcroft. So, my fine cousin, you are warned; and if you dare attempt

to annoy her by look or word, I'll never permit you to call me Cousin Iva again."

With this awful threat sounding in his ears, she left him, and Agnes never knew the narrow escape she had had from Mr. Clarence Sloper's dubious admiration of her charms.

It was eleven o'clock when Lewis called, according to promise, to take Agnes home. He had no thought of going further than the front door, but just as the servant opened it, in answer to his ring, Iva happened to be crossing the hall, and caught a passing glimpse of him. She immediately came forward and held out her hand.

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Hallack. I did not know you were in Somerton until Agnes told me to-day. Come in. You must be cold after your walk, for 't is an eager and a nipping air.' Stewart, take Mr. Hallack's hat and overcoat."

"I—I merely called for Miss Brandon. I had no thought of stopping," replied Lewis, constrainedly.

"You must not think of returning without first taking a cup of chocolate," she said, sweetly, and before he well knew what he was doing, Lewis had resigned his coat and hat to the care of Stewart, and was seated opposite Miss Graham at the elegantly spread supper-table. The room happened to be deserted at the moment of their entrance, and a social cup of chocolate seemed to be a very proper and reasonable thing to partake of. There were ices, fruits, and cake in abundance, but a cup of chocolate was all Mr. Hallack desired. While he was sipping the excellent beverage, and wishing himself a hundred miles away, Iva sat playing with a bunch of luscious hot-house grapes, and wondering why he need be so distressingly formal.

Presently she said, her lips and cheeks the hue of the crimson bouvardia she wore in her hair,—

"You are getting on famously at Cleveland, I hear?"

"I am trying to do my best, Miss Graham. If I fail, I am resolved it shall be through no fault of mine."

"I am confident of that; and, oh, I hope you will succeed."

"You do. Why?"

"Because I—I—one likes to see every one succeed, you know, and especially those whom one has known all their life."

"You are very kind."

Her white fingers continued to play with the purple grapes, and the full, soft, down-looking eyes never once lifted to his face. Mr. Hallack was extremely brief in his replies, confining himself almost wholly to monosyllables; and such perversity did not suit Iva's temper at all, yet she would not for the world let him see that she noticed his indifference, real or assumed. So she said, very guardedly, but with an innocent air, as if the thought had just occurred to her, when, in fact, it had been uppermost in her mind all the afternoon,—

"How nice it is that your mother has Miss Brandon to live with her. Do you not think her lovely?"

"Very lovely."

"And so modest and retiring, and so obliging."

"Yes. My mother, in speaking of her, said exactly the same thing."

"Marguerite found her somewhere, did she not?"

"Mrs. Ware is a lady for whom I have the highest regard. If she befriended Agnes, it was from wise and noble motives; of that I feel assured."

"Marguerite is a woman in a thousand, nay, in a million. You do not know the good she is continually doing, and doing so quietly."

"Perhaps not," dryly rejoined Lewis.

"She is not happily married, they say, and that may have something to do with it."

"Mrs. Ware never confided her domestic troubles to me, therefore I cannot answer."

Iva reddened. She felt the rebuke keenly, and, somehow, she, who could so unmercifully lecture poor Sloper, felt the tears of wounded feeling quickly filling her eyes. Both were conscious that the silence which ensued was rather awkward, but she was a discerning girl, and seeing she had unwittingly run aground on that tack, she immediately changed her course, and veered around to the point where her real interest lay, although she meant to be as diplomatic as Talleyrand, and let her words conceal her thoughts.

"Agnes has a charming voice. I enjoy her singing quite as much as I do Cary's."

"A rarely beautiful voice."

How provoking! Could he not see that she was disposed to be very gracious? Yes. Lewis did see, and seeing, he was in no humor to appreciate her graciousness. Iva was kind. So she was to Agnes, to her footman, to any mere dependent. Lewis had known her ever since

the days of her babyhood, when they had played together under the larches at Cedarcroft, but their relative positions in life were widely different. She the daughter of a millionaire, a sensible, sturdy, stout old gentleman, it is true, but yet with his ideas of social distinction well defined, and one not at all likely to look kindly upon a mechanic's son, even if he were handsome, well-educated, and "reformed."

Mr. Hallack arose to go, conscious that he had shown himself to be a churlish, ill-mannered fellow; yet that were better than to be the plaything of a spoiled beauty who, for an hour, might choose to amuse herself at his expense. Had she not once as good as told him that—but why refer to the past? He breathed freer when the massive oaken door had closed behind him, and he was out again in the sharp, wintry air, with Agnes by his side,—no fine lady to thaw him with a smile one minute, and freeze him with a frown the next. They went down the wide carriage-road together quite silent. The snow-encumbered larches lining the drive on either side, and looking like giants wrapped in winding sheets, kept a furtive watch over the white pleasure grounds and dismal clumps of leafless shrubbery, questioning, as it seemed, the right of any living thing to intrude upon their deep, dark shadows.

It was Agnes who broke the silence by observing, somewhat obscurely,—

"Is it not just like fairy-land?"

"Gracious! No. It is more like Greenland."

"I mean at Cedarcroft. The lights and the music, the banks of flowers, the beautiful dresses, lovely faces, books, and everything."

"It is not much like the little old brown house yonder under the hill, with old mother waiting, and a light in the window to guide us safely to our home."

"Our home! How kind you are, Mr. Hallack."

"Kind for just saying our home? Well, is it not? I am fond of the old place and the old mother; though, in one way and another, I am getting used to other scenes and other faces. Yet I love my mother and the old home best."

"And what a wretch you would be if you did not. I would not exchange the old brown house and its homely comforts for all the splendors of Cedarcroft. It is the dearest spot in the world to me, the very dearest. When I first came there,—and how well I remember it, Mr. Hallack,—I was cold, and hungry, and tired! oh,

so tired, and to-night — why, you can see for yourself how happy and contented I am."

She looked up in his face with a child's loving confidence, and its beauty set going a new train of thought, which she was far too simple to catch the meaning of.

"Do you like those people at Cedarcroft?"

"Yes, indeed. Miss Iva has always been very kind to me."

"And Mrs. Graham?"

"Well, she gave me the muff; and I needed a muff badly. Oh, yes; they are all very kind to me."

"Who is that fellow Sloper? Is *he* kind, too?"

"Sloper? I don't know any Sloper," opening her violet eyes very wide.

"And lucky it is you don't. He's an egregiously conceited monkey; a disgusting excrescence on the maternal side of the Graham family tree."

"Oh, you mean Miss Iva's cousin Clarence. I have heard the family speak of him. Is he so very dreadful?"

"He is rich, and a fool. No more dreadful than that; but it seems to me an excellent combination out of which to make a first-class reprobate."

"He is going to marry Miss Iva, is he not?"

"*He* marry Iva — Miss Graham? Never!"

Agnes could not see why Lewis should flame out like that, or why he should feel so terribly bitter towards young Sloper. She pondered the subject in her mind that night long after her wondering little head was snugly laid on its pillow, but could make nothing of it more than was conveyed in the meagre fact of Lewis's dislike of fools in general and rich fools in particular.

Mr. Hallack returned to Cleveland at the end of the week, and Agnes resumed her work and studies. Days and months passed on, and there grew about her an atmosphere of gentleness and shy, sweet humility that won her many friends, and a something of sadness, too, which was not discontent nor weariness, but regret for the ill-wind that had blown upon her in her desolate girlhood. For to her "the remorseless Past stood ever near, breathing through the broken chords of life its never-ending dirge."

CHAPTER XII.

Grief hath changed me since you saw me last.

SHAKESPEARE.

IN the spring there came to The Maples a pale, sorrow-stricken woman with her child. Marguerite had written a month previous to George Arnold's widow,—

"Come to us, Helen. We live very quietly, but there is heart-room and house-room enough for you and the little Louise at The Maples. So come, and be welcome as the flowers of June."

Helen came, looking very pale and ill, and was tenderly loved and cared for by her old school-friend. But Mrs. Arnold's heart had received a mortal hurt, for she worshipped the husband she had buried only four months before, and life without him seemed utterly empty and valueless.

They were sitting together in Helen's room at The Maples one morning, Louise, with all the happy abandon of a child, lying on the floor near her mother's chair, playing with a battered, flaxen-haired doll as big as herself, when Jeannette brought in the mail. The letter Mrs. Arnold received, and opened in trembling haste, made her white face grow whiter still, and forced a faint cry from her lips.

"It is as I feared, Marguerite; there is nothing left. All is gone, all. We are beggars. For myself I do not care, but my child — to leave her alone, orphaned and penniless, it is that which wrings my heart, and makes this last trouble more than I can bear."

"Louise will never be alone while I live, nor penniless after I am gone. She shall be as my own child. I will give her the place of the little one I have lost, and she shall be to me a dear and sacred trust; for your sake, Helen, in all things will I be a mother to her."

Marguerite spoke to dumb ears. Helen had fainted, and lay like one dead on the carpet at her feet. She quickly rang for assistance, and Jeannette hurried in, as much alarmed and as voluble as she was helpful. They lifted Helen's slight form and laid her on the bed, a wax-white, fragile creature, little fitted to bear the world's reverses and the world's treachery.

"It all comes of the May marriage," bewailed Jeannette, determined not to have that baleful fact overlooked, let come what would. "Mr. Arnold dead, and his fortune all squandered or stolen by his friend; and his friend a lawyer, too, which there's no good in. She is

reviving, poor dear! But such faints do look so like death, they nigh about make one feel as if it were the real thing."

In the midst of Jeannette's homily, Louise ran screaming to her mother, frightened out of her baby senses at the sight of her ghastly countenance and limp, helpless form.

"Mamma is very sick, and Louise must be a good girl and not disturb her," soothed Marguerite, trying her best to hush the child's frantic cries.

"I vill be a dood, dood dirl, if I may tiss my mamma once," she pleaded, holding her doll by one fractured arm as she stood on tiptoe in a vain effort to make her little height reach to the level of her mother's pillow. The kiss was granted, and Louise, greatly comforted, taken from the room, her great black eyes looking back at the still figure on the bed, and her cheeks twin rivers of tears.

When she returned to consciousness, Helen was alone with Marguerite.

"I am very weak and foolish," she whispered, feebly. "I ought to bear up better; but, oh, Marguerite, dear, dear, dear friend!" She could say no more, and fell back on the pillow sobbing heart-breakingly.

"Nay, you must compose yourself," gently remonstrated Marguerite. "See how you tremble. It will never do for you to worry so."

"Read the letter, Marguerite," she said, in a hopeless tone. "It will tell you the worst much better than I have strength or courage to do."

Mrs. Ware complied. The letter was from Mr. Moran, Mrs. Arnold's attorney, and began by saying that he sincerely regretted his inability to send her better news. He had carefully examined Mr. Linde's accounts, and was forced to admit that the management of her late husband's estate had been conducted strictly in accordance with the requirements of the law governing such matters. Mr. Linde was much too shrewd a lawyer to put himself in a position inimical to the law; yet he had no hesitation in saying that, however legally correct the case appeared purely from a legal standpoint, morally she had been deeply wronged. Mr. Linde's explanations were plausible enough. There were bad investments, depreciated securities, shrinkages in real estate, etc. Mr. Moran was truly sorry, but he could do nothing beyond assuring her of his sympathy, and his earnest desire to serve her, could he do so at any future time.

Helen was an orphan, and had no private fortune when she married George Arnold. She had been brought up from earliest infancy by a maiden aunt, who had died since her marriage, and whose income died with her. Mr. Arnold had really left his wife and child a comfortable maintenance. Mr. Linde had been for years his most intimate and trusted friend, and to doubt his honesty would have been like doubting his own. He made him his sole executor, and entrusted to him the settling up of his estate. But soon after her husband's death, Mrs. Arnold noticed a decided change in Mr. Linde's behavior towards herself. He became reserved, avoided her on every occasion when he could do so without subjecting himself to remarks, and finally became so unbearable in his manner, and so unsatisfactory in his explanations, as to compel her to take some decisive step in behalf of her own interest. To that end she consulted Mr. Moran, with the above disheartening result.

Marguerite's thoughtful eyes gathered righteous anger as she read, and when she had finished the letter, she turned to her friend,—

"Believe me, Helen, this bad man will never prosper. Morally wrong, but legally right! Ah, that is a distinction with a difference, truly. What is lawful, it seems, is not always honorable nor honest. Cheating is dangerous only when it is not done legally. Why the innocent should suffer that the wicked may be successful, God alone knows; and what are we that we should question his will?"

"Oh, Marguerite, how wise you are, how good. So poor and friendless as I am, and you to share your home with me, and to do it, too, with all your noble heart shining in your face, all your great, grand soul speaking in your kind gray eyes!"

"You would not be so ungenerous as to deny me the sole remaining pleasure I have left in life—the pleasure of making, or trying to make, others happy? I cannot give you back the dear one you have lost, but I can love you; I can be to you a sister, and to your child a mother."

"Oh, Marguerite, Marguerite!"

No more than that, but, oh, the infinite pathos of the voice which uttered it; the pitiful reaching out to clasp the strong, white hands, compared to which her own were like a faded rose leaf, as nerveless and as weak.

"Let fortune go and men prove false,—false to their vows, false to their trusts, false to every principle of truth and justice,—and still there will be affection, fidelity, and gratitude left in

the world enough to make us retain our faith in God, and some small amount of respect for humanity. And so rest, troubled heart. The worst is over, for we know the worst. Poor, sad eyes, don't look at me through your tears! Smile away the wrong and the sorrow. It will be righted some day, it surely will, Helen; only we must wait, wait for the divine adjustment of all our trials and all our griefs."

"For your sake, Marguerite, I will try to live; but, oh, I do so long for rest, rest infinite and that shall know no troubled waking."

"Alas, Helen, how many of us are longing for the self-same rest you sigh for. Think you I am happy? that I have never tasted of bitter waters, and walked with naked feet over wrong's blistering sands? Sleep now, darling, for there are others crying like you, 'I am aweary, aweary.'"

"Forgive me, Marguerite; I am humanly selfish. Unlike you, there is none of the angel in me."

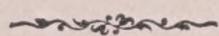
"Hush. I do not merit your praises, and you must be quiet now and sleep." Marguerite kissed her friend, and softly left the room, feeling that Helen would indeed soon find the rest she longed for.

She rallied a little as the summer advanced, but it was a deceitful strength, not given to last, and when October came again, and The Maples were all aglow in their autumn dress of scarlet and gold, Helen quietly passed away.

Her last words, addressed to Marguerite just before her gentle heart ceased to beat, were,—

"I give my child to you, and well I know she will never miss or know the want of a mother's love and care. And so, dear friend, farewell."

They buried her beside her husband, and one could not mourn her early death, knowing they were united again in a land where there is no parting.



CHAPTER XIII.

This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath,
May prove a beauteous flower. SHAKESPEARE.

WHILE Helen's feeble existence was slowly wearing itself out at The Maples, Agnes was undergoing a very different sort of experience at the old brown house under the hill, and one which, though it filled her with indescribable dismay, had a kind of happy misery underlying it.

The Grahams were preparing for their annual summer flight to the springs and the sea-shore, and for more than a month Agnes had been kept busy getting Miss Iva's wardrobe in readiness for the season's campaign. She was alone in the sewing-room, one afternoon, trimming a lovely white muslin dress that looked as if the June winds had blown it together, when the door opened, and a portly, middle-aged gentleman unceremoniously entered the room.

"I beg your pardon. I thought Iva was here," he said, in a tone of apology. "I am Miss Graham's uncle, Allen Thorndyce."

"I will call Miss Graham."

"Pray do not disturb yourself. With your permission, I will wait."

"My permission? Why, I am only the seamstress."

"And you are beautiful enough to be Jove's cup-bearer," thought Mr. Thorndyce; but he took good care to keep his thoughts to himself.

"I suppose I may remain if I promise not to interrupt your sewing, or lay so much as a finger on any of these delicate, cloud-like fabrics, which are destined, no doubt, to enhance the charms of my dear niece?"

Agnes simply bowed, and went on with her work, just as if no handsome, hazel-eyed Allen Thorndyce sat opposite her, watching the rapid movements of her deft fingers and the quick coming and going color that mantled her fair cheek. The trim figure, in its perfectly fitting and neatly made blue cambric dress, and the lovely golden head bent over a pile of lace-edged ruffles, were beautiful enough to captivate the fancy of a much older man than Mr. Thorndyce, and there is no telling to what giddy heights his imagination might have led him, were it not that Iva opportunely appeared in the midst of his castle building, and effectually put his airy dreams to flight.

"You here, Uncle? Why, how did you come to wander so far away from your beloved billiards?"

"I knew your heart would be where your new dresses were, and where a woman's heart is there will you find the corporal part of her. I came to implore you to do me a great service. Would your ladyship be so obliging as to sew this button on my glove for me?" holding up the article in question.

Iva took the glove and immediately tossed it over to Agnes.

"You have thread and thimble handy, do sew the button on that we may be rid of him

as soon as possible. Dear old Uncle, why will you always be bothering me?"

"Be consoled, child. I am going to drive with Clarence, and that I deem a sufficient punishment for all my sins either of omission or commission, past, present, or to come."

Having sewn on the button, Agnes handed Mr. Thorndyce his glove, and, as he had no further excuse for remaining, he reluctantly withdrew.

Mr. Thorndyce was Mrs. Graham's half-brother, and therefore only Iva's half-uncle; but he was very fond of the girl, and she really loved him "next to her father better than any one else alive," as she frequently assured him when in a particularly affectionate mood.

Mr. Graham was an exceedingly amiable and kind-hearted old gentleman, but there were two things in this world which he could not abide. One of these was Clarence Sloper himself, and the other was Clarence Sloper's "trap," as that fashionable youth called the high, yellow-wheeled, attenuated, wasp-bodied dog-cart he drove behind a long-legged, chestnut filly made up of composite parts of blood and speed. The good man invariably fled whenever that rakish vehicle made its appearance, and for no earthly consideration would he have risked his life in it. But to Clarence it was heaven. That trap had cost him many anxious days and sleepless nights before he had been able to bring it to its present state of absolute perfection.

"A thing of beauty, and a joy forever," he poetically exclaimed to his Uncle Graham, the first time he brought it around for his inspection.

"A thing of beauty! Why, it's the devil's own rig, and looks awfully imbecile; though in that respect it suits *you*, Clarence, to a charm," Mr. Graham had replied, with uncompromising disgust.

And this was the thing into which Mr. Thorndyce clambered with some difficulty, and no slight misgivings as to his personal safety. But Clarence was in high feather, and said, as he gathered up the reins,—

"I'll let her out when we strike the river road. She cost me a cool two thousand, but she's pure Leamington from ear to fetlock. See the style of her! Oh, but she can go—has a record of 2.29. Speedy? She'll fly if you ask her to!"

As if to prove her master's words well founded, Lady Jane—for so named was this fast daughter of Leamington—came down to the

road handsomely without a break or the turning of a hair.

"She clips along beautifully, does n't she?" cried the excited Sloper. "I say, Thorndyce, what do you think of her?"

"As fine an animal as ever felt a bit; but what a pity it is a fool should drive her. A filly like that deserves a better fate than to be owned by you, Clarence; upon my word she does," replied Thorndyce, rather too candidly.

"Look a here, now, that's deuced rough on a fellow. But you will have your fling, just like Iva. She's always lecturing me, especially if I dare to look in the direction of her pretty sewing-girl. If I were a dragon or a vampire, she could n't be more watchful. That's Iva's hectoring way; but if Agnes Brandon had an ounce of sense she'd avail herself of her opportunity, and not be so shy of a kiss from—"

"Mind where you are driving, boy; do you want to break my neck?" impetuously exclaimed Thorndyce, abruptly interrupting Clarence's graceful flow of eloquence.

"Whoa, Lady Jane. Whoa! easy, girl, easy!" said Sloper, pulling in the mare sufficiently to allow of Mr. Thorndyce recovering his breath, and resuming the conversation again just where it had broken off.

"I'll own she won't flirt. I've tried her. Looked killingly at her once, when Iva was not by, and she actually ran away. And several times, when at a distance, I've waved my handkerchief at her this way,—you know the style we fellows have," drawing from his pocket a delicately-scented cambric handkerchief, and giving it a slight, peculiar wave, first to the empty air and then gently across his thin, taffy-colored mustache,—"so, twice! It speaks volumes when you've the thing *au fait*. And, egad, if she did not fly to cover like a frightened partridge. 'Pon honor, she could n't have appeared more terrified if I had pointed a loaded pistol at her."

"And no wonder, you conceited puppy. Aspasia, herself, would run from you, if you were to attempt the wooing of her with *that* sort of a leer on your monkey face. And if I catch you making eyes at Miss Brandon, I'll cane you, you odious young scamp, as sure as my name is Allen Thorndyce."

Clarence laughed uproariously.

"Why, where's the harm? She is only a sewing-girl."

"See here, young man; let's have no more of this."

"Egad! You've a look now worthy of the high and mighty Mrs. Ware. That woman always reminds me of regions of eternal ice. They say Ware could n't stand it, and—"

"By heavens, Clarence, you tempt me to throw you out of the trap neck and heels. Hold your stupid tongue; but if it must wag, I charge you, let Mrs. Ware's name alone."

"Struck another snag, have I? Oh, well, I am not particularly interested in either of them. Agnes is a protégé of hers. Is that the reason of your flaring up so?"

"You insufferable idiot! If there were a spark of manliness in your egotistical carcass, it seems to me you could find something better to do than insulting a friendless, hard-working girl, or speaking disrespectfully of a good, high-minded woman. Set me down here. I'll take a turn or two by the river, and walk back to Cedarcroft."

"I meant no harm, 'pon my soul, I did n't. Come, now, Uncle, don't cut up rusty," pleaded Sloper; but Thorndyce would n't listen to him, and five minutes later Clarence drove off alone, leaving his uncle by the roadside to make his way back to Cedarcroft as best he might.

Mr. Thorndyce was a well-preserved man of forty, wealthy, fine-looking, and a widower. It was currently reported that his marriage had been very far from being a happy one, and when death dissolved the tie, he mourned his loss like one not without comfort. He had married, young, an heiress and a beauty, who had had her own way from her cradle, and had no idea of giving up her love of flirting simply because she happened to be married. A gay, brilliant and courted wife seldom makes for her husband a happy home, and Allen Thorndyce had as wretched a married experience, if the truth were known, as any man living. But a cold, caught at a ball, resulted in a fever, which proved fatal within ten days thereafter, and Mrs. Allen Thorndyce had finished her gay, careless course of life and gone to a land where domestic miseries are unknown. Mr. Thorndyce was both a large-minded and a large-hearted man, and would no more have sought to trifle with Agnes's affections than he would of murdering her.

"Why, I am only the seamstress!"

Thorndyce burst out laughing as he recalled the look of astonishment with which Agnes had spoken the words.

"So that lovely little Miss Brandon is a protégé of Mrs. Ware's," he mused, as he walked

slowly along the river-bank after Clarence had left him. "What a wonderful mass of golden hair she has, and eyes as blue as the sea, and a tender child's mouth, made to be kissed, but not by Sloper, confound him! I'll be obliged to thrash that boy yet. One could forgive him for being an idiot, but his insufferable impudence is unpardonable."

The very next day, savagely as he had reprimanded his erring nephew for a like transgression, or one as near like it as any Sloper was capable of understanding, Mr. Thorndyce took a stroll in the direction in which he knew he would be sure to meet Agnes on her return home from Cedarcroft. He wished it to appear as if it were by the merest chance he happened to be there, and his well-assumed look of surprise, when he saw her, would have deceived a much wiser woman than Agnes.

"I am going your way, and, if you do not object to my company, I'll walk as far as the turn with you," he said, politely lifting his hat.

Had it been Sloper, she would have ingloriously fled without standing upon the manner of her going, but this open-browed, respectful, kindly-appearing gentleman could not be so summarily disposed of. She simply bowed assent, speaking never a word; but her silence did not surprise Mr. Thorndyce.

"We are going to be favored with a magnificent sunset. Are not those floating opaline clouds in the west beautiful?"

"Very beautiful," she replied at random, without lifting her eyes, but perceptibly quickening her footsteps.

Thorndyce smiled, and the quizzical look he bent upon her manifestly added to her distress.

"I must leave you here," she said, desperately. "I wish to see Miss Briggs. Good-evening," and she ran up the little path to the Briggs cottage, thankful to have escaped Mr. Thorndyce's further company so easily.

"Told a fib that time, I'm sure of it," thought Allen, as the form of Agnes disappeared from view, the quizzical smile still hovering under his long, grizzled mustache. "You had no idea of visiting Miss Briggs until you saw in it a plausible excuse for getting rid of me. Well, I can't say as I like you the less for it, my little pearl!"

Again and again it "happened" that Mr. Thorndyce met Agnes, and in a way, too, that made it utterly impossible for her to avoid him without treating him with positive rudeness, a

thing which she could not readily bring herself to do.

Nothing could be more respectful than his manner towards her; but she felt that she must speak, and ask him frankly not to meet her any more, for she was not so simple as to suppose these frequent meetings were any longer purely accidental. So the next time he joined her, Agnes put her sensible resolve into practice, and said, with a quiet dignity quite new to her,—

"Mr. Thorndyce, will you please never do this again?"

"Do what?"

"You know very well what I mean; and it is not right. You must see that it is not right."

"You refer to my walking with you?"

"Yes."

"Are you afraid of me? Have I said anything to make you dislike me?"

The warm blood suffused hotly cheek and brow.

"Oh, no, sir. It is not that. But I am not your equal in any way. I am lowly born, uneducated, and without name or family or anything; and it is not possible for you to really care for me."

"Suppose I were to care for you very much; what then, Miss Brandon?"

"Then you would leave me," she answered, simply. "Leave me to the peace I thought I had found here at Somerton, far away from the scene of my early trials."

"How many thousand years have you lived, Miss Agnes?" he asked, with a perfectly unmoved countenance.

"So long that I cannot 'bear the world nor the world's ways.' I am merely beautiful, nothing more. I know it to my everlasting sorrow, and speak of it as regrettably as another would speak of a physical deformity. I was happy, at least I was trying to be so, until you came, and you are as pitiless as the others. I cannot bear it. I cannot, I *will* not!"

She fled past him swiftly, as a frightened deer, and left Thorndyce standing in the middle of the road the picture of amazed mystification.

"Aunt Judith, I am going to ask Miss Graham to allow me to take my work home after to-day," said Agnes, that evening, endeavoring to appear unconcerned. "They are all very kind to me at Cedarcroft; but I like best to be at home with you and Benny."

Mrs. Hallack was not to be so easily blinded. "What's gone wrong, child? Has that little brainless beast of a Sloper been plaguing you?"

"Oh, no, Aunt; but I—I'd rather be with you all the time; indeed I would."

"If it is that Sloper," went on the old lady, energetically, paying not the slightest heed to Agnes's denial, "I'd give him a piece of my mind he'd not be apt to forget in a hurry. He a gentleman? Lordy! he's no more a gentleman than I'm his grandmother!" looking down significantly at her stout shoe, as if it were the wholesome, old-fashioned kind of discipline for lack of which poor Sloper had grown up the immoral youth he was.

"He made eyes at me once; and one day he said something silly about its being 'deuced hard that Ganymede was not permitted to speak to Hebe;' but I ran away, and would not listen to him."

"I'll Ganymede him, if he dares to show his face here," rejoined Mrs. Judith, with increasing wrath.

"But it's not he—it's not anybody in particular," protested Agnes.

As she could give no better reason for wishing to take her work home than the flattering one of wanting to be with "dear Aunt Judith," Mrs. Hallack was obliged to accept of it as being the true one; though she still distrusted Sloper and his "monkey capers."

Mr. Van Cleaf's health declined so rapidly that his physician advised him to spend the winter South, and early in November Marguerite and her father set out for Florida.

The afternoon of the day following their departure Agnes passed at The Maples, soothing the childish grief of little Louise, who cried incessantly for "my own Aunt Marguerite," and refused to be consoled until Agnes came and sang "Bonnie Blue Bells" till she was hoarse,—"Bonnie Blue Bells" having especially captivated Miss Louise's musical ear.

She left the child asleep and started homeward, when who should she see approaching her, just as she was nearing the pines, but Allen Thorndyce.

"I am not here by accident," he began, as soon as she was within speaking distance. "I waited for you, because I have something to say to you of a nature which makes or mars a man's life. I am quite an old fellow, or must seem so to you; but I love you very dearly, and if it is at all possible for you to care for me in return, will you be my wife, Agnes?"

"Your wife? Heaven help me! I your wife?"

She drew back trembling, scared, bewildered,

every vestige of color forsaking her face ; yet a wondrous thrill of hitherto unknown rapture pervaded her whole being, and made her heart beat tumultuously.

"Oh, do not, please do not talk like that to me," she pleaded, conscious that she loved him — loved him as she had never loved Maurice Ware. There was no blind infatuation in this. It was the fair, free love of her womanhood, not the foolish worship of a child.

And now, merciful Father! how dared she look Allen Thorndyce in the face, and permit him to say that he loved her? Oh, no, no ; she must spare him that crowning humiliation, though she murdered her own heart in the doing of it. She tried to lie, and deny that she cared for him, but the falsehood died unuttered on her lips. He read the truth in her troubled eyes and smiled.

"You do care for me, do you not, little one?"

"Yes; but I cannot be your wife."

"Why?"

"I cannot tell you why. Be satisfied that I cannot."

"You do not love another?"

"No. But let us go away from the pines. I cannot bear the sound of their moaning."

She shivered and hastened onward, Thorndyce walking beside her, puzzled, but doubting her not a whit. She was poor, and had been poorer. If it were worse than that, well, he had known those who were not poor, who were surrounded by friends, and lived in luxurious homes, who had gone very near dangerous precipices, and if they did not take the fatal leap, it was through no merit of their own. He knew that she loved him, and had known it ever since the day she bade him to meet her no more.

When they were well beyond the pines, he asked,—

"Now, Agnes, will you tell me?"

"Oh, there are so many reasons. Your family —"

"Pooh! I do as I like in matters of this sort. That ghost is laid; now for another one to rise."

"I have been so awfully poor. I shudder when I think of all I have gone through. Don't waste your affections on me, for I tell you truly, I am not worth a single tender thought."

"My dear child," he took her passive hand and held it lovingly in both of his; "my dear child, you are talking to a man who was not

born yesterday, and your being poor does not matter in the least. I believe in you, and I love you, and now tell me why it is you cannot be my wife?"

"Not to-night. It is nearly dark. I want time to think. You believe in me, you love me; for God's sake, Mr. Thorndyce, don't do either! Be at the willows on the opposite side of the river to-morrow at three o'clock, and I will tell you why your wife should not be Agnes Brandon."

She broke from him, and fled home as fast as she could go, flew up to her room, threw off her hat and shawl, and sank down beside the bed, crying bitterly.

"Oh, that it should come to this, and that I should love him so after all the hateful past! But he need never know. If I did not care for him, it would be so much easier to bear; but I do—I do love him dearly."

Aunt Judith came up-stairs, full of kindly solicitude, and asked if she were ill.

"I've a bad headache, and I do not want any supper. Please let me lie here alone, aunty, till the pain gets out of my eyes"—heart she was going to say, but changed the word in time to prevent arousing Aunt Judith's curiosity. She insisted, however, upon Agnes taking a cup of tea, which, having done, the poor girl begged to be allowed to remain in quiet. The old lady softly retired, shutting the door carefully behind her, and Agnes was left alone, but not to sleep.

"I will tell him all to-morrow, and when he knows how meanly born and reared I am, he will be cured of his love," she sobbed, burying her tear-stained face in the pillow. "He will forget me soon enough then, I know he will," the tears falling faster than ever, for she really did not want him to forget her, though it seemed for his own sake that he ought. "Oh, if he would only forget her; but, oh, how bitter if he did!" and then came the passionate cry for Marguerite—the weak nature calling for the strong one. She knew, and she could advise her; and then again might not that dreadful Coke find her out, and threaten her as he had threatened Maurice Ware?

Agnes did not shut her eyes the livelong night, and the next morning, noting the extreme pallor of her face, Mrs. Hallack was forced to the conclusion that it was the tea which had kept her awake. "Too strong for you, child; and it made you wakeful and nervous."

"Yes," said Agnes, faintly; "I think it must have been the tea."

CHAPTER XIV.

"Poor child!"

He said, with such a pity in his voice,
It soothed her more than her own tears.

MRS. BROWNING.

THREE o'clock the following afternoon found Agnes on her way to the appointed tryst. Mr. Thorndyce was there before her, and greeted her with a fatherly smile.

"Now for the awful secret," he said, lightly. "Why, how pale you are, little one. Wait until you are more composed before commencing the soul-harrowing narration," determined to treat the matter jocosely; and to show his indifference unwittingly said the very thing which enabled her to plunge at once into the subject without preliminary circumlocution. "How deep the water is here. I never thought the Juniata had so swift and strong a current."

"I did; for it was here I came to drown myself."

"What!"

"But for Marguerite, from the very spot where you now stand, I'd have thrown myself into the river, and ended my misery forever."

"Agnes, for heaven's sake, don't trifle with me."

"I am not trifling. It is true — horribly true. I told you there was nothing of me but my face; it never brought me any good; and I wish, from the innermost depths of my heart I wish, that Marguerite had not saved me."

Thorndyce recovered himself. Her strange, stony calmness convinced him that she had nerved herself to bear the worst, and bear it, too, with desperate ease. It was evidently her purpose to draw her past in so dark a light that he must, in all conscience, turn from her in disgust and self-humiliation, ashamed to confess that he had ever loved so pitifully weak a creature. But in this she failed. Mr. Thorndyce merely smiled — a tender, loving, encouraging smile that made her long for the earth to open and swallow her up.

"You have not frightened me yet, poor foolish little thing! If you want to make me believe you very, very wicked, you must not look at me with such pleading, innocent eyes. Now sit down beside me on this mossy old stone, and tell me the tale of horror to its end."

"Mr. Thorndyce, you are laughing at me."

"No, my dear child, not at all. You are a bit of a creature in so big a world alone. My only wonder is that you escaped the ravenous

wolves, the wily serpents, and the hovering vultures which inhabit every part of God's fair earth, and prey upon just such tender, helpless, unprotected morsels of humanity as yourself."

"I did not escape," she replied, calmly. "They came so near devouring me that I sought the river's bed for safety. I have known what it is to go two days without food. That is to be in the grasp of the wolf, hunger, is it not? I've shivered with cold in a garret, so cold that the breath froze on my lips and the tears on my cheeks. What call you that, Mr. Thorndyce?"

"I call it heroism transcendent, and the woman who evades the world's vultures after that, and keeps her soul pure, is one in a million."

"Well, I did keep my soul pure *after that*. I lived with my mother in a dreary attic, up six dismal flights of dark, narrow stairs, and we had but one friend, a young law-student, who lodged in a room on the fourth floor. He was poor too, but not so poor as we were. My mother was sick a long time, and when she died — I was sixteen then — he buried her, and was very good to us, so everybody said."

"But your music. Who taught you that?"

"Old Paglioni, the lame street musician. He gave me lessons for more than a year. It was his purpose to train me for the stage; but he died, and the gold he fancied hidden in my throat is there still, if ever there was any so hidden."

"Unless it became tired of remaining in obscurity, and came out, like the sunshine, and tangled itself in your hair, my pet."

"And I sang on the street corner once," she went on, taking no notice of his prettily turned compliment.

"You did? I am heartily glad old Paglioni died. He taught you quite long enough."

"And then I saw for the first time, to know what it really was, a serpent."

"Very flashily dressed, no doubt; recklessly liberal and offensively familiar?"

"Yes. But how did you know?"

"Oh, I simply guessed the sort of viper your face and voice, publicly exposed on a street corner, would be likely to attract. Well?"

"I ran home. Both my mother and — and the poor law-student warned me never to do so again, and I never did."

"The poor law-student! Did he see the danger, too?"

"Yes. And gave us money to pay the rent, though he could ill afford to do so. After my mother died, I still lived in the attic, for I had

no other home, and no one to speak a kind word to me except Mrs. Tully, who was pleasant and obliging when we paid our rent, but cross and unsocial when we did n't. I was so lonely, I cried sometimes the whole night, and grew afraid of the sound of my own footsteps. But the days and the months passed somehow, and I lived through them as best I could, until a year ago, when a man, whom I'd never seen before, came to the attic in Gillingham Row, and wanted me to help him do a very wicked deed. I dare not stay with Mrs. Tully any longer after that, so I ran away and wandered to Somerton. I can't tell you the reason, but I had a desire to die here."

"Had you ever been to Somerton before?"

She did not appear to hear the question Thorndyce asked with so much meaning, and continued as if he had not spoken.

"I came over the hill you see yonder, just where the cross-roads meet, of a chilly October afternoon, and looked down in the quiet valley with eyes that never expected to witness another sunset. There was the river, blue and still, as I fancied the waters of Lethe must be, the dark grove of pines, the pleasant homes, and brown harvest lots speaking of garnered plenty, of peace and of happiness; but in all the world *I* had no home. The monuments in the cemetery were the only friendly objects my eyes rested upon. I envied the dead their dreamless sleep. I longed for the forgetfulness they had found, and in my madness, in a moment of unutterable despair and misery, I sought it of the river."

"Poor child!" There were tears in his eyes, and the tenderest compassion in his voice. "Poor, lonely, unhappy child!"

"It was Marguerite who saved me. It was she who put new hope into my heart, who bade me live and to be useful, and to wait patiently till God called me to render up my life. She sent me to Mrs. Hallack, where I have been ever since, and — and that is all."

"All?"

"All I have to tell."

"Who was the poor law-student?"

"Maurice Ware!"

Thorndyce was thoroughly aroused now, and a troubled look of doubt and distrust flitted across his kindly face.

"And through him you came to know Marguerite?"

"Yes; and Somerton and the strange man who was the cause of my leaving Mrs. Tully's," she answered, very slowly.

"I always believed Ware to be at heart a scoundrel, but if he were kind to you—"

"Oh, no, no, no!" she cried, passionately. "He was kind to my mother, not to me, never to me!"

For a single instant he looked searchingly in her face. From pale it had become crimson, and the wide, violet eyes, which had met his own unflinchingly while relating the story of her poverty, lowered confusedly. Allen Thorndyce felt confident that she had *not* told him all. But he was generous, and loved her. Aye, loved her, though that faith-destroying "all" stood between them like a mocking spectre, nameless, intangible, but still there; and he must love her dearly, if he could clasp her to his bosom, if he could take her to his heart of hearts, and see nothing of the phantom which lurked so near. For a little time he wavered, for a little time he doubted, then the god-like triumphed. Love's surpassing magnanimity, love's heaven-born forgiveness, swept away all doubt and all shrinking. She was more sinned against than sinning — so young, so ignorant, and so tempted. He took a turn or two up and down the river-bank for a short distance before he stopped, and said: —

"What you have told me, Agnes, does not signify. I never lived in an attic; but if I had, I dare say I'd not have been one-half as good as you were. I am a man not readily persuaded to relinquish a settled purpose, and I now renew the offer I made some weeks ago, and ask you once again will you be my wife, Agnes?"

"You really mean it after — after what I've told you?"

"About the ga'ret, the street-singing, the drowning, and the — well, that's all, is n't it?" He refrained from adding "law-student," because that was the only thing he *did* care about.

"But just think what *might* have happened to me," she urged, as if the man's active mind had not already taken in the terrible possibilities, and sifted them as one would wheat from the chaff.

"Yes, I know; it's a very sad, unpleasant past, full of danger, want, and misery; and if the worst *had* happened to you, I am not sure but what I would still have loved you quite as well as I do now."

"You would! And you can say that truthfully from the bottom of your heart?"

"I can, indeed."

A look of indescribable joy lighted her face.

"You could love and forgive me! Noble,

generous, kingly soul! And I—what am I, that I should dare to stand in your presence?"

She fell on her knees at his feet, and lifted towards him her trembling hands.

"I cannot be your wife; but I thank you, and I love you. Nay, I set you so high above all mere earthly affection, that I must look heavenward when I whisper my love, when I speak *your* name. Lowly as I kneel to my Maker I kneel to you, and kiss the very dust beneath your feet. I have no tears, no words of thanks, but I am grateful, oh, so grateful!"

"Agnes, my dear one, listen to me." He raised her gently to her feet, and stood with his hand resting lightly on her shoulder—lover, father, and friend in one. "I am forty years old, and my lines of life have not always fallen in pleasant places. True, I am rich. I never wanted for anything except that which money cannot buy—happiness. Your poor little sins," he smiled queerly; "well, what are they when we argue from the standpoint that knowledge regulates the magnitude of the sinning?"

"I care for you very much," faltered Agnes; "but I'd rather love you as we love that which is good and pure and far above us, than have you find out when too late that you have made a mistake."

"Men of my age rarely make a mistake in affairs of this kind. Boys of twenty-two do many foolish things, but at forty we are wise and cautious, especially when we have burnt fingers to remind us of past short-sightedness."

"But I am not at all what you think me. Oh, if Marguerite were only here to advise me!"

"So, you wish Marguerite to decide for you. I can scarcely agree to that."

"She is so wise, so just, so far-seeing. She could not decide wrongly. For love of her, will you not wait?"

"No."

"For love of me, then?"

"Ah, that disarms me. I will wait for my answer until Marguerite returns."

"And you will go away from Somerton?"

"Why so?"

"It would give you time to change your mind, and think better of the offer you have made me."

"You wish to put my love to the test?"

"And forget me. Yes."

"I will go away to-morrow."

"Thank you."

"I may kiss you before we part, may I not?"

"No; please, no. Leave me now. I'd rather be alone."

He lifted her hand to his lips, bowed, and left her, standing white and still as a statue under the old chestnut-tree, and the next day he departed from Somerton.

CHAPTER XV.

Gently to hear, kindly to judge.—SHAKESPEARE.

MARGUERITE and her father did not return until the middle of April, and she had been at home but three days, when Agnes sought the long waited for, yet painfully dreaded interview that should lay bare her heart, and make Marguerite the arbitrator of her fate.

"I came to see you, and to tell you something; but I don't know how to begin," she faltered, hardly daring to lift her eyes to Marguerite's face.

"I have not been so stern a friend in the past that you need fear to trust me now," she replied, pleasantly.

"I do not fear to trust you. It is not that. You saved my life; but since you have been away, I've come to believe that it were better, perhaps, to have let me die that day, for I am very, very miserable."

"You must be to talk so wildly; and you look pale and ill. It is not a revival of the old misery, is it?"

"No, only the shadow of it. I tried to live quietly, and be happy with Aunt Judith and my music; but he saw me, loved me, and the seeing and the loving have made me wretched."

"And who may '*he*' be who saw and loved you?"

"Allen Thorndyce."

"Allen Thorndyce! Well?"

An odd little smile played on Marguerite's lips, and she did not appear half so much surprised as Agnes had thought she would be.

"He asked me to be his wife."

"And what did you say? What answer did you give him?"

"What could I say but no?"

"Because you did not love him?"

"Because I *did* love him."

"I fancied that might be the reason."

"I told him of my poverty, my lowly birth, my vagrant wanderings, and that I was going to drown myself if you had not prevented me; but he only said, 'Poor child,' so compassion-

ately, and that he loved me none the less because of my early sufferings."

"And why should he love you the less?"

"Oh, Miss Marguerite, don't you see; he did not really know all! I had kept back the worst, and it was that of which *I* was thinking, while he thought merely of what might have been."

"Quite likely. And what confession did he make to you?"

"To me? Why, none! What had he to confess?"

"A great deal, no doubt, were he to tell the exact truth."

"I never thought of that."

"I dare say not. We women take men for what they appear to be, and not for what they really are."

"Men are never very good, are they? I mean as regards the way they have of treating us as if it were no harm to break a woman's heart, and laugh her love to scorn."

"I am afraid not. But in what manner can I serve you?"

"I told him I would confide in you, and be guided by your counsel. But even you do not know all."

"Yes, I do; but I am scarcely equal to the task of advising you in a matter of this kind."

"You cannot know that it was—"

"Yes."

Agnes covered her face with her hands, and, crouching on the floor at Marguerite's feet, burst into an agony of tears.

"He was so hard and cruel! and I—I never saw him, never, never, heaven be my witness! after you were his wife. I tried to save your happiness, for he said that you loved him. Oh, you do believe me when I say I never meant to wrong you."

Marguerite drew herself up proudly.

"The man does not live that can trample on my heart at his pleasure. Want and temptation have never beset me. I've battled with no adverse fate; but you, oh, Agnes, from your very infancy you have been in the vanguard of poverty's struggling millions; and that you escaped with only one wound proves how true and pure and noble a heart you carried into the conflict, aye, and brought out of it; I say, none the less pure and true and noble for the single scar upon it. There's my hand, and there does not breathe the man who dares to say he ever touched it lightly. I place it in yours. I kiss your forehead; and if so be you love Allen Thorndyce, and he loves you, I declare before

God and my conscience you are fit to be his wife!"

"Oh, Marguerite! Marguerite!"

Such a cry as it was, accompanied with a look of such ineffable joy, that Marguerite could scarcely restrain her own tears.

"Nay, not to me, but to God must you kneel. To him must you look for the higher redemption," she said, gently.

"Ah, yes, the higher redemption," sighed Agnes, with the glad light still in her eyes. "But do you think he would still love me, Mr. Thorndyce, if he were really to know?"

"He is a man of quick discernment, and you are a very poor dissembler. You cannot lie with any sort of grace; and you have not learned to counterfeit the smile which serves to mask deceit, and apes the manners of innocence. You only know how to be truthful, and love for love's own sake; and this being so, I think Mr. Thorndyce already knows your secret."

"Knows it!" She sprang up, seized with a kind of sudden terror. "Knows it! Oh, no, no, Marguerite!"

"He is a far better judge of human nature than I; yet I found no difficulty in reading your heart. A look would tell him more than you could relate of misery in an hour. The droop of an eyelash, the quiver of a faltering lip, would be enough for him without the adding of a single word; and it is more than probable that you have unwittingly betrayed yourself. And now that we understand each other, and have nothing to fear or conceal, forever and ever, between you and me, on this subject, let there be eternal silence," replied Marguerite, decisively.

"Yes. Silence as deep and lasting as the grave; but forgetfulness, tell me where shall I find that?"

"In God's boundless, all-saving, everlasting love."

"And nowhere else?"

"What higher forgiveness would you ask?"

"None," gasped Agnes, trying desperately to steady her voice. "I feel as if I were stifling, as if—but why should I trouble you with my wretchedness? Forgive me, and forget, if you can, this last poor weakness of mine."

She rushed from the house and fled down the garden-path, heedless of little Louise's imperious call to remain and sing "Bonnie Blue Bells" for her. Agnes hurried on, and never slackened her speed until a good quarter of a mile was between her and The Maples, when, misery upon

misery, she suddenly came face to face with Allen Thorndyce. But even then she did not stop, nor seem to see the hand he offered.

"No, I cannot stop," she cried, growing as white as a sheet at sight of him. "I cannot, indeed."

And she was gone without giving him time to recover from his surprise. The dark eyes that watched the girl's flying figure out of sight were strangely sad and pitiful.

"To think I've been all over the civilized world, and gotten pretty well down to the lees of life, and then for the child to suppose that I — Oh, well, what is thinking but an idle waste of thought?"

Thorndyce passed his hand across his forehead, his strong, handsome face turning ashy white. Ah, that were a mighty triumph for thee, love, when home to his heart came the dagger-thrust, and he forgave the sin for love of the sinner!

Agnes reached her room at the cottage more dead than alive, and threw herself, dressed as she was, on the bed, where Aunt Judith found her two hours afterwards, with rapid pulse and fever-flushed cheeks. Agnes was very ill. Mrs. Hallack was sure of it, and sent post-haste for the doctor. The venerable physician came; asked the usual questions, and pronounced the young patient's malady to be a low kind of nervous intermittent fever, superinduced by too close confinement to work. But a name uttered by Agnes in her semi-delirium, caused Mrs. Hallack to prick up her dull ears, and nod desirously at the retreating back of the unsuspecting old doctor.

"A precious wise one you are, Dr. Spear. It may be nervous intermittent fever *now*, but it was n't brought on by over-work, by a long shot. It's Allen Thorndyce who's at the bottom of it. I suspected Sloper, but it seems I was out of my reckoning in that quarter. I really did think Thorndyce a gentleman, and above triflin' with the feelin's of such a chit of a girl; but you can't trust any of 'em where a woman is concerned, they are just that lyin' and deceitful. Oh, but won't I give it to him if he comes within hearin' of my tongue!"

Aunt Judith fairly ached to "get at him," it never occurring to her that Mr. Thorndyce's intentions might be quite honorable.

Many were the kind inquiries and appetizing delicacies sent from Cedarcroft during Agnes's long illness. Hot-house fruits and flowers, and strengthening wines and cordials; dainty

bunches of violets, breathing of spring and fragrant woodlands, purple heliotrope, early rose-buds, and sweet-scented mignonette, floral offerings which came every day, sent ostensibly by Miss Iva. But Agnes thought she saw in them the silent, loving tribute of another hand, and nestled them down in her bosom when Aunt Judith was not by to note how particularly fond she was of Cedarcroft flowers.

One day, when she was convalescent, Mr. Thorndyce boldly presented himself at Mrs. Hallack's door, and with all the coolness in the world asked to see Miss Brandon.

"No, you can't see her," snapped old Judith. "She is up-stairs asleep, and I'd not awaken her if a king were to ask me to do it. I've been wantin' to speak my mind for some time, and, now that you have given me the opportunity, I'm goin' to improve it."

"But, my good woman —"

"Don't 'good woman' me. You're here for no good. A man of your age, too, galavantin' after a girl young enough to be your daughter," exclaimed she, in high dudgeon.

"You are laboring under a very great mistake," protested Thorndyce. "If you will but hear me, I —"

"I've heard all I want to hear. Agnes has not been like herself this six months, and in her flighty spells she said your name in a way that made me know the reason of her not likin' to go to Cedarcroft, and the superinducin' of the fever. So I say keep to your station, and let the child alone. You will find a-plenty of gay birds eager to respond to your whistle, without your coming here to hector the life out of a poor little hedge-sparrow that kept to itself, and never sought your company."

"You wrong me, Mrs. Hallack, indeed you do," he rejoined, earnestly.

"Well, I'd rather wrong you a hundred times than that you should wrong Agnes once," retorted the dame, majestically.

"Then you will not let me see Agnes even for a moment?"

"Not for a second. And where are your manners, sir, that you can't say Miss Brandon?"

"I beg your pardon. Will you please say to Miss Brandon that I called, and deeply regretted the injustice which prevented me from seeing her?"

"No; I'll tell her nothing of the sort. I won't even let her know that you had the impudence to speak of her, not I; and that's an end on it."

The obdurate Mrs. Hallack shut the door in Mr. Allen Thorndyce's astonished face, and loftily resumed her knitting. Baffled, but not discouraged, Allen endeavored to effect his purpose, and with rather better success this time, in another direction.

"Iva," he said, a day or two after Aunt Judith's sharp rebuff, "Iva, when did you last see Miss Brandon?"

"Yesterday. She is getting along nicely."

"She is a poor girl. You are a rich one. She makes your dresses, but you wear them, and that oughtn't to make such a very great difference between girl and girl, ought it? No doubt the young fingers have grown very white and slender during the weary weeks they have lain idle, and what a kind act it would be for you to take Miss Brandon driving in your pony phaeton this charming afternoon."

"Oh, you sly old fellow! Going to make a cat's-paw of me, are you? I do believe you are in love with Miss Brandon."

"Nonsense! A mere act of charity," replied Allen.

"Is it, indeed! Old Granny Townsand has been sick for ever so long, and is but just recovering. Suppose I take her instead of Agnes. An old woman who snuffs, and whose face looks like a dried prune, might find an afternoon ride quite as enjoyable as a pretty young girl with violet-blue eyes and a becoming pallor," laughed Iva, archly.

"A woman who snuffs has no claims whatever on my sympathies. I thought you knew as much, and that you loved me, Iva?"

"So I do, uncle dear, and I'll take Agnes; but you will please remember it's all for sweet charity's sake."

Mrs. Hallack was more than gracious when Miss Graham drove up to her humble door, and gayly announced that she had come to take Agnes for a drive. The phaeton—a low, easy-going affair, drawn by a pair of steady, sure-footed ponies—looked just the thing for two girls to nestle in of a sunshiny May afternoon. For it was May now, and "the crimson in the maple shoots" reddened warmly the hills. Agnes enjoyed every moment of the time, and was so pleased that she could not help expressing her gratitude.

"How did you ever come to think of it?" she asked, wonderingly.

"It's no goodness of my own, I can assure you," replied Iva. "Uncle persuaded me into doing it. I suggested old Granny Townsand;

but he thought you needed fresh air the most. Besides, you do not snuff. He hates snuff."

"Oh!" Agnes bent all her attention on the lap-robe, a faint wave of color creeping to her cheeks. Iva, the wicked creature, thoroughly enjoyed her companion's confusion.

"Uncle is the most kind-hearted person in the world, and always thinking of the poor and afflicted, while I never think of anybody but myself."

"You are very kind and good, I'm sure, and I—I hope you are jesting, for I had rather it had been you who thought of taking me, and not Mr. Thorndyce."

"Oh, Agnes, how you are fibbing, and just arisen from a sick bed, too. It is very, very sinful! There, don't cry, and I'll promise not to tease you any more. See how the kittie willows are shaking out their plumpy blossoms, and the white birches have a feathery tassel under every leaf," said Iva, growing compunctionous when she saw the tears slowly gathering in Agnes's eyes. "You like it now, don't you?"

"It's the loveliest ride I ever had. I feel better and stronger already."

"That is pleasant. But I must not keep you out too long. If you were to take cold, Aunt Judith would never forgive me."

The ponies were turned around, and soon thereafter reached the widow's cottage, where Agnes, tenderly assisted by old Judith, alighted, and Iva drove home alone. Mr. Thorndyce took early occasion to ask if Miss Brandon had enjoyed the drive.

"Oh, ever so much!" replied Iva. "She was like a child, admiring everything, with the prettiest color and the sweetest smile. Oh, you would like to have been in my place, I know you would?"

"Iva, come here. There is a nice kiss for you, and when you marry, I'll give you a goodly portion."

"See that you don't forget it, uncle dear," putting her arm around his neck, and accepting of the kiss as a matter of course. "We are an incorrigible family for making unsuitable marriages. Mamma says she wonders I have n't married a beggar long before this."

"You might marry a beggar, in your mamma's opinion, and yet be very happy," replied Uncle Allen, cautiously.

"Do you really think so?" with a merry, sidelong glance from under her dark lashes. "And an old fellow might marry quite a young

girl and not wish himself dead within a twelve-months thereafter."

"Iva, I think I hear your papa calling you. Run away, now, and don't let that chattering tongue of yours be too glib in its random suppositions."

"I'll be very obedient and very discreet; but I can't help thinking, and putting two and two together."

"Very well; but see to it that you do not think aloud."

"Are those lovely violets and tea-rose buds you ordered, to go to old Granny Townsand or dame Judith Hallack?"

"Neither. Dame Judith Hallack is a she-dragon, a soulless witch of Endor!"

"A conscienceless hag, who watches over unprotected beauty, and prevents Persephone from being carried off by Pluto. Oh, uncle, uncle; and at your time of life! Comes there never a period in man's existence when a girl's fair face has no power to charm?"

"Never, Iva, never; or, if there does, then let Allen Thorndyce die, for assuredly he will have lived long enough."

"Thou reasonest well, Plato," commended Iva; "and now I'll go and see how fares my lady mother."

CHAPTER XVI.

I take her as God made her, and as man
Must fail to unmake her, as my honored wife.
MRS. BROWNING.

IT was the middle of May before Agnes was well enough to walk as far as Chestnut Hill. Mrs. Hallack insisted upon wraps sufficiently numerous to have withstood the cold of a January day, and saw her depart with many injunctions not to sit on the damp ground, or to tire herself by walking too far. Agnes was not strong yet, and did feel very tired when she reached the top of the hill, and sat down on a convenient stone under a large chestnut-tree to rest.

"Well, here I am," she said, with a sigh of satisfaction, speaking aloud for the edification of any bird or squirrel which might chance to be within hearing distance.

"And here am I, also," said a voice close beside her.

"Oh, Mr. Thorndyce!"

She made an effort to regain her feet, but

could not from sheer weakness. He very considerately took no notice of her agitation.

"A horribly anxious time I've had of it," he remarked presently, seating himself beside her without waiting for the formality of an invitation. "Mrs. Hallack treated me as if I were a robber, whenever I ventured to call; and were it not for Iva's kind offices, I'd have been more miserable than I was."

"Did you call?"

"Certainly I did."

"And Aunt Judith never told me."

"Aunt Judith is a very obstinate and unconvinced old woman; but as she is not here, and is not supposed to be Argus-eyed, will you now answer the question I asked you so long ago? Do not tremble so, my dear; 'tis a simple question, and easily answered, if you will but let your heart speak for you."

"Mr. Thorndyce, you are very, very good; but I cannot be your wife," she faintly whispered, with a piteous lowering of her humbled eyes.

"But you love me?"

"And it is because I love you that I say no, a hundred times no. Did I not tell you—"

"Nothing which made me love you any the less."

"Not anything?" very wistfully.

"You did not, upon my honor. You can't think what a wicked fellow I've been, and were I to tell you all about it, would *you* love me the less?"

This extraordinary admission rather startled her.

"No; but you — you can't mean —"

"I mean just this. You had a childhood without one bright spot in it, beset on every hand by unseen dangers; and if you had gone a long, long way astray, I'd still have found it in my heart to forgive you, because, poor child, you were a little, stray speck of a girl, who had somehow gotten adrift on a very big sea, and the only marvel is that you kept afloat at all. You shivered in your rags, you starved in your garret, yet you managed to keep through it all what remained to you of truth and innocence, and so I take you, Agnes, just as you are, with all your imperfections on your head. I take you into my life of lives, my heart of hearts. Will you come?"

He opened his arms. She tried to speak — tried to utter some feeble protest. A sobbing sigh quivered through the white lips, and faint, cold, almost lifeless, she dropped her head on

his bosom, and over her soul surged the mighty consciousness of a perfect, self-forgetting, deathless love. The world seemed going from her in a rush of wild emotions so exquisitely thrilling, so bewilderingly sweet, so altogether happy, as to nearly deprive her of her senses. He knew all, yet he loved her. He had compassion on her youth, he had pity for her desolate, unguided, danger-fraught childhood. Her brain reeled, her heart felt as if it were not large enough to contain her joy.

He gathered her close in his arms, and looked lovingly down in the shy, sweet face lying like a beautiful flower on his breast, and which one would have thought never a rough wind had shaken, or a blighting frost touched.

"From this hour the new life begins, and never shall the old terrifying ghost of the past trouble you more. Let me kiss away all the sorrow, all the tears, and all the old haunting regrets. You are not afraid to trust me?"

"Afraid to trust you? Oh, no, no! And you do really love me, you who are so good and so noble; for I'll not believe that you were ever wicked."

She put a little thin hand on either side of his face, and looked up in the kind, dark eyes with a curious expression of mingled gratitude and timidity.

"I am quite old, you see," he said, purposely misunderstanding her meaning. "Plenty of gray hairs and plenty of crow-tracks."

"Oh, I was not thinking of that," with a quick blush. "If you had been younger, like — like —"

"Mr. Clarence Sloper, for instance."

"I'd not have cared for you at all."

"I feel highly complimented."

"And what will Mr. Sloper say, and Mrs. Graham, and Iva? Oh, it will be very dreadful!"

"Perfectly horrible! Mr. Sloper in particular."

"You are laughing at me again."

"Seriously, then, it does not matter what they say," said Thorndyce, in a very firm, determined tone of voice. "Iva will doubtless view it in the light of a charming romance, and be secretly pleased. Mrs. Graham will hold up her hands in holy horror at first, which horror will end in her sensibly making the best of it. My sister is famous for the admirable way she has of excusing and accounting for what she terms 'an unpleasant state of things,' when she sees that further objections are of no avail. And now,

to make assurance doubly sure, when shall the happy day be?"

Agnes felt her cheeks growing uncomfortably warm.

"Not in May. Jeannette would never consent to that."

"Before it was Marguerite, and now it is Jeannette who must be consulted. When shall it be, then?"

"Whenever you like, only not in May."

"Then shall it be in the leafy month of June?"

"Oh, that's very soon."

"I know it is for the getting up of a trousseau — confound that word! it has bankrupt more fathers than dealing in margins ever did — but not too soon for us to be happy in a rational way. I've a very vivid recollection of a trousseau which cost some twenty thousand dollars, but I'll be hanged if there was ever twenty cents' worth of either pleasure or comfort gotten out of it."

"I'm not likely to spend that amount of money on mine, in any case," she smiled. "I don't think I can afford even the conventional white silk."

"I'll speak to Iva about that. She will help you, I'm sure, and see that the dress is all that it should be. We will go from sardonic Mrs. Hallack's, your porcupine aunt by the grace of circumstances, to the little church where Marguerite was married, and from there we will go, where do you suppose, my pet?"

"I'm sure I cannot tell. To Niagara?"

"Niagara? Bah! with a bride and her spoony liege reclining under every tree, and occupying every available chair and sofa. No, we will go to Italy."

"Italy? Oh, Mr. Thorndyce!"

"You owe that much to the memory of Signor Paglioni, and I think you also owe me the kindly favor of remembering that my Christian name is Allen."

"Allen! Yes, I will remember. Poor old Paglioni! music and Italy were his idols. And I may go, I may really go with you there, Allen?"

"You really may, my darling; and what a happy, happy day it will be when we are alone together in that land of love and art."

"Yes. Alone together, and I will love you so," she softly answered, "love you so dearly, and as I never thought I could love any one. But I must go home now, for it is getting late, and my porcupine aunt — how naughty of you

to speak of her in that way — will be wondering where I am."

Mr. Thorndyce needed no further urging, for he did not forget that Agnes had been very sick, and was still far from strong.

Infinite was Mrs. Hallack's astonishment when Allen appeared before her, leading Agnes by the hand, and very composedly said, "Miss Brandon has promised to be my wife, and we are come to crave your blessing on our union."

"Your wife?" Mrs. Hallack dropped her knitting and stared at him incredulously.

"Yes, my wife. Is there anything so very strange in the announcement that you should look at me as if I had threatened to devour her?"

"Dear Aunt Judith, it is true, though I do not deserve to be so happy. He ought not to love me; but he does, and so I—I've promised," added Agnes, her cheeks the hue of a blush rose.

"Well, I vow I am beat!" exclaimed the old lady, sinking back in her chair completely overcome.

"But if *this* is what you meant, why didn't you say so?" she asked, after a moment's reflection, recovering her peppery manner, and looking whole volumes of rebuke at the innowise disconcerted Thorndyce.

"I did try to; but you would not listen to me."

"I'm sorry to have misjudged you, but it was my duty to be on the safe side. I hope you will pardon my roughness, seein' as how I did it for the girl's own good; and you are welcome to stay to tea if you like," she said, anxious to make amends for her late severity.

Mr. Thorndyce gladly accepted of her invitation, and Aunt Judith went immediately to kindle the kitchen fire and put on the tea-kettle. As soon as she was gone, Agnes crept around to her lover's side and nestled her hand trustingly in his.

"And so, my birdie, you have no pressing message to deliver to Miss Briggs this evening, and nothing to scare you into running away from me as if I were an ogre bent on the pleasant pastime of eating every girl I met?"

He pushed back the golden glory of her hair and kissed the fair white forehead, above which it lay like an amber cloud, with the rose-flush of cheeks and lips beneath it, and eyes deeply and tenderly blue as the innermost leaf of a meadow violet,—a face like a summer sunset, fair, golden, sea-shell tinted, and his own, to

lie in his bosom, to kiss, and to love through all the coming years. He thought of it with a kind of reverent rapture, and an intensity of feeling which made his voice peculiarly low and gentle.

"My darling, tell me of what it is you are thinking. That dimpling smile must surely be the harbinger of happy thoughts?"

"I was thinking of the lines which were so constantly in my mind when I was ill, and one day I actually caught myself singing them, though Aunt Judith insisted they were the merest nonsense, and I was only nervous and flighty."

Agnes went to the piano, seated herself, and began to sing,—

The breeze comes sweet from heaven,
And the music in the air
Heralds my lover's coming,
And tells me he is there.
Come, for my arms are empty!
Come, for the day was long!
Turn the darkness into glory,
The sorrow into song.

"And you have turned the sorrow into song, Allen. You have made me, who was so wretched, the happiest of women."

Early in June Agnes and Thorndyce were simply and quietly married. Iva responded nobly to her uncle's eloquent appeal that she should superintend the getting up of the bridal toilet, and in return Iva impressively declared "It should go off nicely, even if she had brain fever afterwards to pay for it." Mrs. Graham, when she found "the thing was bound to go on," as Sloper graphically summed up the matter, gracefully took upon herself the task of furnishing the wedding breakfast. No Thorndyce, while she lived, should be married without a wedding breakfast. No, not if the bride had not the second dress to her name. "Agnes was certainly beautiful," reasoned the sa-gacious lady, "and a year or two in Europe would improve her wonderfully. Thank heaven, she had no family! No brothers to provide for; no sisters to be ashamed of; no parents to look after. 'T is true she came to Somerton rather mysteriously; but Mrs. Ware had vouched for her respectability; and Agnes's face and voice and sweet disposition would win her friends anywhere."

So the breakfast was given, and Mrs. Graham had the proud satisfaction of knowing that she had risen above all mere petty prejudice; rec-

ognizing in the broadest sense the truism that worth far outweighed the accident of wealth; and by her presence sanctioning in a most becoming manner her half-brother's second marriage.

CHAPTER XVII.

Beyond the stars that shine in golden glory,
Beyond the calm, sweet moon,
Up the bright ladder saints have trod before thee,
Soul! thou must venture soon. ANON.

"MARGUERITE," said Mr. Van Cleaf, one morning, when he appeared a little stronger than usual. "Marguerite."

"I am here, papa; what is it you wish?"

"Go to my writing-desk, and bring me the packet of papers you will find there."

She did as he requested, and brought the packet.

Mr. Van Cleaf took from it a neatly-folded paper, and handed it to his daughter.

"It is my will, Marguerite; and, with the exception of a few legacies to our old servants, I have left you everything."

"Oh, papa! please don't mention such a thing to me. I have borne many griefs, but this I cannot bear," she cried, falling on her knees beside the bed and quickly dropping the paper.

"Dear child, I know it pains you; but I must speak. Courage, my daughter! We must submit to the inevitable. Now read, and tell me are you satisfied?"

"Oh, it is right. Whatever you do is right," she replied, barely glancing at the dreadful paper, which mutely spoke of death in its every fold.

"I never touched your mother's fortune," went on Mr. Van Cleaf, calmly. "It has always been yours, and now I give you mine; and so safely invested that you will never be placed, as poor Helen was, at the mercy of a knave. I have made no charitable bequests, because you can do greater good with money than most people; and I also left it to you to provide for our little Louise. You will know what is best for her as she grows older; and God grant that she may be a blessing and a comfort to you."

"Oh, my father, my father! how can I ever live without you?"

Marguerite hid her face in the pillow, close to the cheek so white and wasted, and gave way to the tears she could no longer control.

"Nay, do not cry so bitterly, my child. There will still be work for you to do; and by and by, oh, happy day! you will come to me again, and there will be no more tears nor parting."

He laid his feeble hand on her bowed head, and kissed and blessed her as she knelt sorrowing beside his pillow, bidding her be of good cheer, and question not the wisdom of One who "doeth all things well."

In less than a month from that day Richard Van Cleaf died, and so quietly that those who stood around his bed scarcely knew when the freed soul took its peaceful departure. Marguerite saw him laid beside her mother on the sunlit hill-side, and over the old grave and over the new fell the autumn leaves and drifted the winter snows. How lonely her home was now. The vacant chair, the silent room, the unread books, the only gay voice, the only light step heard in the house was that of little Louise, who would be a child though Death rapped loud and often at The Maples.

CHAPTER XVIII.

How little do we know that which we are!

How less what we may be!

BYRON.

IT was a great victory for Iva when she finally obtained Mrs. Ware's promise to accompany herself and family to the White Sulphur Springs the summer subsequent to Mr. Van Cleaf's death.

"There will be six of us, to say nothing of Cousin Clarence and little Louise," remarked Miss Graham; "and if we don't have just the loveliest time, it will not be my fault. Brother Wilfred will be away with his shooting-party the most of the time, so we can't depend much upon him for doing escort duty; but there is Clarence, who is better than nobody in case of an emergency."

It was the last week in July when the Grahams arrived at the Springs and took up their residence in a pretty terraced cottage in Colonade Row. But poor Sloper, it being the height of the season and all the desirable rooms "taken," had to accommodate himself to less pretentious quarters in Virginia Row, where splint-bottom chairs, pine wash-stands, and liliputian ewers were esteemed luxuries, and a looking-glass a foot square a thing to be thankful for. Think of the elegant Sloper making

his toilet under such soul-crushing disadvantages. Think of lavender-hued trousers, cerulean neck-ties, and lemon-colored kids having to emerge from such beastly surroundings. But nobody minded Sloper or sympathized with his discomforts.

In the very heart of the Alleghanies, remote from the noise of cities and the hurry and rush of life, lies the little secluded valley in which the famous old "White" bubbles up its clear, sulphurous waters, and woos its thousands of pleasure-seekers as regularly as the seasons roll round. On every hand are mountains magnificently wooded, range after range and peak after peak rising one above the other as far as the eye can see. It was infinitely consoling to the much-tried Sloper to know that, for a glimpse of these majestic mountains, a breath of the pure, invigorating air, a sip of the healthful waters, the bluest blood North and South gladly availed itself of the limited comforts of Virginia Row, and took its ease, in linen duster and panama-hat, for a month or so of uninterrupted rest and Arcadian simplicity.

Under a kingly live-oak on the lawn were seated Mrs. Overton and Mrs. Rowley, two Baltimore ladies, industriously "filling in" wool-embroidered flower-pieces of so impossible and intricate a nature as to make the use and purpose of them when finished a mystery to every one but themselves. Mrs. Overton was an aristocratic-looking old lady, with short white curls clustering around her high, pale forehead, a dressy cap of duchess lace and purple ribbon giving her a stylish, high-bred appearance quite at variance with Mrs. Rowley's short, stout figure and round, rosy face. On a bench a little distance from these ladies sat Marguerite, reading Tennyson's "Princess." Mr. Sloper and Iva, with some other young people, were playing croquet under a neighbouring oak, and Louise and her nurse had gone for a walk.

Destiny overtakes us in many guises, and at times and places where we least expect to meet the one who may become the soul's "dearer half," without our being at all conscious of it. Certainly, Marguerite had no inward premonition that the elderly gentleman slowly walking towards them would eventually

Attune anew the heart's broken chords,

or that she would be to him, e'er these idle summer months were ended, the one beloved of all created women.

The gentleman stopped and shook hands with Mrs. Overton and Mrs. Rowley.

"I had no idea of seeing you here, I'm sure," said the latter lady, briskly.

"I came by advice of my physician; but I find it rather lonely," replied the stranger, in a low, cultivated tone of voice.

"Dear me! how forgetful I am. Mrs. Ware, let me make you acquainted with Mr. Fairring."

Marguerite bowed, and saw standing before her a man below the medium height, with a pale, delicate, clean-shaven face, hair quite gray, covering a finely-shaped head, and deep-set dark-blue eyes. There was about him such an air of child-like dependence and simplicity, that Marguerite instinctively treated him with the consideration due an invalid, and made room for him on the bench beside her.

"You do not look strong. Will you sit down and rest awhile?"

"Thank you. I find that even a short walk tires me very soon here. I am not used to mountain clambering."

"Then you are city nurtured, and unfamiliar with woodland paths and breezy hill-tops!"

"Yes. But it is a delightful place; and pleasant people one meets here, too."

Just then Louise came running to Marguerite with her hat full of wild flowers, lips and cheeks aglow, and her eyes shining like stars.

"I gathered them all myself. See! pink laurel and daisies, wild primroses, and ever so many more!"

"Your daughter?" said Mr. Fairring, laying his hand gently on the child's black curls.

"No. The daughter of a dear friend; but I love her as dearly as if she were really my own child."

"My mamma and my papa are dead, and my grandpapa, too," promptly explained Miss Louise. "And Bruno is dead, and I have n't anybody but Aunt Marguerite — not anybody at all. And my 'Blue Bells' is away over the big sea, miles and miles. She sent me this," twisting her fingers in the slender gold chain she wore around her neck, to which was attached a pretty locket representing, in enamel, a tiny blue bell. Louise did not believe in the old-time maxim that children should be seen and not heard; and her baby treble was sure to make itself prominent whenever she herself was visible.

"You talk too much," admonished Marguerite, giving the prattling mouth a silencing kiss.

"What noble trees, and what absolute quie-

tude," resumed Mr. Fairring, seeing Louise fairly engrossed with her flowers; "and where in the world could one find grander mountains?"

This unlucky remark again brought Louise to the fore in defence of her beloved Pennsylvania.

"We have got bigger trees at Somerton, and a river—a real river; not a mean little brook, like that over there," nodding her head contemptuously in the direction of Howard's Creek, which flowed adjacent the pine-fringed slope of the Stroll. "A nice wide river with a bridge, and mountains ever so much higher than these, have n't we, Aunt Marguerite? And I've four dollies at home, and a swing, and two kitties," anxious to impress upon the stranger's mind the superior magnificence of Somerton scenery and the vastness of her own possessions.

"Run away, Louise," chided Marguerite; "you are really a spoiled child."

"Lisette says I am an *enfant gâté*. Most forty times a day she says it," laughed the little elf, with a shrug of her tiny shoulders, as she trotted off to her nurse.

"You love her very dearly, no doubt; but she may grow up to have children of her own, and forget all your love and care," said Mr. Fairring, with a curious expression of countenance.

"I have seen something of human ingratitude, but I cannot conceive of any so black as that," replied Marguerite. "Louise is of gentle blood. Her mother was one of the loveliest and purest-minded women I have ever known, and her father a man of the most noble principles. They died young, and I suppose I've been rather more indulgent towards the little child they left me than has been altogether good for her manners; but Louise is an affectionate, warm-hearted little creature for all her naughty way of talking when she ought to be silent."

"Ah, yes; gentle blood! That may make a difference."

Mr. Fairring arose somewhat abruptly, and went away. He was scarcely out of hearing before Mrs. Rowley said:

"You unconsciously gave Mr. Fairring a hard hit. He has an adopted daughter who, they say, is not of gentle blood, at least not particularly so; and I never heard of her being overstocked with either gratitude or amiability."

Before Marguerite could reply, had she thought of doing so, Iva came sauntering to-

wards them, idly clipping off the heads of the yellow buttercups with her mallet, and looking, in her white dress and cardinal ribbons, as fresh and bright as the morning.

"How did you like the hop last evening, Mrs. Rowley?" she asked, as soon as she was within speaking distance. "I saw you dancing nearly the whole time."

"Oh, it was perfectly splendid; and I always make it a point to enjoy myself wherever I am."

"So do I. It's the true philosophy of life, though I can't get Mrs. Ware to believe it. And if one does n't enjoy one's self, what is the good of ones going anywhere?"

"No danger but what you will get your share of life's pleasures, Miss Graham. You certainly did not lack for beaux last evening. I can affirm to that," laughed stout little Mrs. Rowley.

"No; I don't think I did; and excellent ones, too; for governors, judges, generals, and authors were as plenty as blackberries. I went in to supper with a general, who was a whole encyclopædia of battles, and could boast a dozen scars, all of which were won on the field of glory; and such a mustache as he had! Did you notice his mustache, Clary? Lovely, wasn't it?" turning to her cousin.

"Horrid, egotistical cub!"

"Cub? The general is fifty, if he is a day."

"Bear, then, perfect bear!"

"Envy, pure envy!" responded Iva, leaning on her mallet and looking at her cousin with provoking commiseration. "With such a mustache as that, Clary, I don't think the woman lives who could resist your charms."

"I am sorry to leave such good company," said Mrs. Rowley, glancing at her watch. "But I bathe at eleven, and it is now five minutes past that hour."

The stout little lady gathered up her fancy work, and with a friendly farewell nod to each, tripped rather clumsily away.

Sloper put up his glass critically.

"Horrid fat! No style, and walks like a goose. Stupid place—deuced rocky roads—can't speed anything. Rode a gray cob to Dry Creek yesterday that I'd not mount again for a hundred dollars."

"Poor, dear Clary! How thoughtless of the stupid natives. They should have had the roads macadamized for your especial pleasure. We are going to Falling Spring to-morrow, a charmingly romantic spot, and had counted upon your being one of the party; but if the gray cob has done for you, why, we must try to

get along without your agreeable society. The general is going, booted and spurred like any free lance of the middle ages, and rides a magnificent bay that carried him gallantly through the Wilderness fight, and still bears the mark of a sabre-cut in the neck, and a deeper scar where a rifle-ball furrowed its way through his shoulder. Ah, that's the sort of an animal to ride!"

"It's no fault of mine that I've no war-horse, or that I'm not a hero," ruefully exclaimed Sloper. "If I were fifty years old, I dare say I'd have been in the fight on one side or the other."

"Yes; the safe side. The home guards would have had a noble recruit in my Cousin Clary."

"I'd like you to remember, Iva, that I am not always to be made a joke of."

"No; for a joke is sometimes a very serious thing, and you are never that. But will you go with us to Falling Spring? Kate Morris is going, and I really think she will be glad of your company."

Sloper's face brightened.

"Perhaps I may—deuced beastly jaunt; but it's not so stupid as remaining here and seeing a lot of wheezy old rheumatics toddling around the whole day long."

CHAPTER XIX.

There are many men who appear to be struggling against adversity, and are happy; but yet more, who, although abounding in wealth, are miserable.

TACITUS.

THE sun had not yet risen above the blue summit of the Greenbriar mountains when Marguerite set out for an early walk. She turned into an unfrequented path that led along the margin of the creek for a little distance and thence to a disused chalybeate spring, partly filled up with stones and overrun with briars and wild morning-glories. It was a place seldom visited by any one at that early hour, and as Marguerite neared the spot she was a good deal surprised to see Mr. Fairring seated under a beech-tree close by, and, like herself, alone.

He arose and came forward to meet her, his face more than his words expressing his pleasure.

"I am a poor sleeper, and the morning being so fine, I rambled out much earlier than usual."

"It is a favorite walk of mine. One can

witness such superb sunrises from yonder eminence, where all those trailing shadows and gray nebulous vapors are lifting and falling, and changing shape and hue every instant. Already Kate's mountain, the blue peak you see there to the southward, begins to catch the rosy glow of the rising sun."

"I am so unaccustomed to living among the mountains, that I cannot understand why it is one's heart and mind become calmer here than I have ever known mine to be anywhere else," he said, thoughtfully.

"I am going further up the hill," rejoined Marguerite. "From that point one may count a hundred mountains standing boldly out against the sky, and Great Sewell, more than forty miles away, towering above them all."

"I may accompany you, may I not?" he asked, simply; and she could do no less than acquiesce. At the summit of the acclivity a fallen tree-trunk offered them a comfortable seat, and Mr. Fairring, at least, was glad enough to rest.

"It is very pleasant," he said, contemplating a tuft of white clover growing at his feet. "I do not think I ever before knew what real enjoyment was."

"The most of us find out, when too late, the mistakes we have made, and how it was we came to miss of happiness," she replied, her thoughts insensibly reverting to the past.

Hugh Fairring was also thinking of the past, but in a way very different from that which Marguerite might suppose. Of what value were his millions, since they had never brought him a single hour of genuine pleasure. His cheerless home, his empty heart, his loveless existence, he thought of with a sigh, and wished—what did he not wish in that moment of unavailing regret?

"I am not so old by ten years as I look," he remarked, after a pause; "but I sometimes think I have lived quite long enough. I have tried in many ways to do right, yet at forty-five I can't help feeling that my life has been a failure."

"Then the fault is your own," replied Marguerite; "for life to no one, under any circumstances, should be a failure."

"And *your* life, Mrs. Ware," he asked, earnestly; "how did you save it from becoming a failure? from being all shadow and no sunshine, all tears and no gladness, all disappointment and no hope?"

"I saved it," she said, with her gray eyes

fixed on the luminous east, away and beyond him, where God's own light was shining, clear and serene as the new day, "I saved it *by saving others.*"

CHAPTER XX.

And love's the noblest frailty of the mind.—DRYDEN.

M R. FAIRRING sat alone on the porch of the Graham cottage pretending to read the morning Herald; but, try as he would to interest himself in the closely printed columns before him, his thoughts would go rambling off to Marguerite with a persistency that puzzled him. Every turn of her head, every glance of her soul-lighted eyes, every tone of her low, earnest voice dwelt in his memory like the recollection of some sweetly harmonious song heard long after the singer was silent, and the music lost to the ear. Had he married a girl like Marguerite, what might she not have made of him? Like thousands of other men, Hugh Fairring had made a mistake in the great venture which makes or unmakes a man's life. Duty is a hard taskmaster, and asks of the heart, generally speaking, more sacrifices than it can willingly give—a stern-visaged tyrant, who remorselessly throttles love, and, like the Caucasus vulture, eats into the very soul of him who tries to satisfy his natural yearning for affection by putting in its stead so poor and cold a substitute as duty. For more than twenty years Hugh Fairring had been trying to do this, and the result was not such as to make any one envious of his fate.

His gloomy reflections were brought to a timely end by the return of Mr. and Mrs. Graham, and a moment later Iva and Clarence arrived, and their presence was always fatal to melancholy and blue imps.

By nine o'clock everybody had "gone over to the hotel," and the cottages were deserted.

Sloper said it was too deuced warm to dance—made a rag of a fellow. He'd go and play a game of billiards with Boothby, and take a glass of something cool. Marguerite and Mr. Fairring, with several others, mostly invalids and rheumatics, were seated in the parlor, when a quick step halted beside her chair, and a voice said, in accents of undisguised pleasure,—

"Mrs. Ware, I hope you are glad to see me?"

"Mr. Hallack! What a pleasant surprise."

They shook hands warmly.

"Mr. Fairring, Mr. Lewis Hallack, a very dear friend of mine."

The gentlemen went through the usual polite forms of an introduction, and the conversation thereafter became general.

"When did you arrive?"

"This evening; and as soon as I had washed off the dust, and made myself somewhat presentable, I set about hunting you up. Went over to the cottage, but found it dark as Erebus, and then commenced searching through the hotel. No small task, for there is a crowd everywhere. They stored me, and two others, away in a closet in Bachelors' Row, and there I am expected to remain during my stay, I suppose. But how well you are looking. The waters must agree with you."

"Thank you. I fear I've led a very indolent life since I've been here."

"Is Mrs. Ware never idle when she is at home, Mr. Hallack?" asked Mr. Fairring, in his quiet way.

"Rarely. She is the most industrious person in Somerton. A good Samaritan, author, friend, and helper; never sparing herself, nor letting her left hand know what her right hand is doing."

"You flatter me, Mr. Hallack. Ah, here comes Iva. The springs have done wonders for her, if you think the waters have improved my looks."

"Mr. Hallack! Now, indeed, are we favored of the gods!" she exclaimed, coming gracefully forward and extending her hand. "When did you arrive, pray? and where are you lodged?"

"I arrived within the hour, and I am lodged I hardly know where. I believe they speak of the place vaguely as Bachelors' Row. My particular dwelling has a tree growing through the roof, and moss romantically carpets the doorsill."

"Charming abode! Cousin Clarence will sympathize with you."

"Oh, well, I don't mind. I like things primitive. I had a week's vacation, and concluded I'd just take a run over the Alleghanies and see Mrs. Ware for a change."

"Oh, what a fib!" thought Iva, but she dropped her eyes demurely, pretending to believe him.

"Will you take a turn on the piazza?" he asked, presently. "It is a lovely evening, and the mountains must look grand in the clear,

mellow moonlight." She laid her hand on his arm, and they went away together.

Marguerite looked after them with a tender smile, and Mr. Fairring, too, seemed to think the departing couple two very happy young people.

As Lewis and his lovely companion passed out on their way to the moonlit veranda, they nearly ran against Sloper, who had finished his game of billiards, as well as his glass of something cool, and was in quest of his cousin at that very moment. Neither Iva nor Lewis took the trouble to more than nod an apology, and Clarence put up his glass angrily.

"Hallack, by all that's impudent!—beast! That fellow has the cheek of a cast-iron chimpanzee."

Sloper was strong in adjectives when his temper was aroused, and this he felt to be an occasion worthy of his choicest expletives. He'd find Kate Morris; yes, by the gods, he would! and show Miss Iva that flirting was a game two could play at. With this commendable object in view he straightway sought the above-mentioned lady, but the sequel of his dark design, as future events will show, were less harmful to that young person's peace of mind than Clarence intended they should be. While her revengeful cousin was meditating the doing of this dreadful deed, Iva was saying to Lewis,—

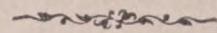
"You will enjoy your week here, I'm sure, and see a great deal of Marguerite," with a sly, sidelong look from under her long lashes. "You were presented to Mr. Fairring, of course; a delightful old gentleman! He has taken a great fancy to Mrs. Ware. He is a millionaire, with a grievance. Has a domestic skeleton of some sort,—padded room, with grated windows, and a maniac wife, epileptic or something; perfectly awful, but *so* romantic. Just like the hero in Jane Eyre, only he is not young, nor handsome, and hasn't a bad temper. Marguerite is the taller by half a head, and takes a kind of motherly interest in him, I suppose, on account of his poor health, and his being so entirely alone."

"A very nice old gentleman, I should say, from the little I saw of him."

"Yes; and Marguerite treats him exactly as she used to do her father. I remember how quietly she would close a door or window to shut out the night air, or open them to let in the sunshine, and was always so thoughtful of his little comforts. No one can help loving

Marguerite, old or young. I am as fond of her as if she were my own sister."

And so they talked while the summer-night waned and the moon went down behind the tree-tops; and who so happy as Iva when she laid her head on its pillow, in the wee small hours, and thought how glad she was that Lewis had come so far to see — Marguerite.



CHAPTER XXI.

It's we two, it's we two, it's we two for aye,
All the world and we two, and heaven be our stay;
Like a laverock in the lift, sing, O bonny bride!
All the world was Adam once, with Eve by his side.

JEAN INGELOW.

THE week after Lewis's arrival, Iva planned a picnic for his sole delectation. There was Mrs. Rowley, always ready for anything which promised pleasure and good company; Mr. and Mrs. Graham, Marguerite and Mr. Fairring, who had never been to a picnic in his life; Miss Morris and Sloper, nine in all; just enough to fill two carriages, if Cousin Clarence would sit on the box with the driver. The proposition, if not eagerly caught at by some of those selected for the excursion, was good naturally assented to; and as early as seven o'clock the carriages and hampers were ready, and the whole party were on their way to Beaver Dam Falls, some twelve miles distant, where the eventful picnic was to be held. After leaving Dry Creek, a little village about a mile from the Springs, the road led directly up the mountain and through a continuous forest of magnificent oaks, laurel, beech, and pine. It was nearly noon before they reached the Falls, a wild, turbulent cascade plunging over a perpendicular wall of rocks more than a hundred feet in height, and its steep banks overshadowed by towering hemlocks that seemed to have stood there, dark and grim, for ages. Ferns and lichens covered the stones; and the rush of the torrent, as it dashed foaming and hissing into the rocky chasm below, threw a cloud of spray far above the low-hanging branches, and drifted mistily over the surrounding reeds and mosses.

Everybody, with the exception of Mr. Graham, who said he'd not risk his neck even if it were to see the second cataract of the Nile, set out to explore the Falls. Mrs. Rowley and Mrs. Graham ventured no further than the plateau above the main fall, where they could, without getting giddy, see the water gather itself for a final leap

over the precipice. Mr. Fairring, with many secret misgivings, accompanied Marguerite, making the descent slowly and by the easiest path, avoiding as much as possible the flying spray and loose stones. But the incessant roar of the water deafened and bewildered him. His head became dizzy, his steps uncertain, and he leaned heavily on Marguerite for support. Mrs. Ware had noticed, at a very early stage of their acquaintance, Mr. Fairring's morbid dislike to being thought old, or a confirmed invalid; but she could not help remarking the extreme pallor of his face, and the evident effort he was making to appear himself.

"Mr. Graham certainly chose the better part. It is too cold and damp for you in a ravine of this kind. I never saw a place more grave-like and gloomy; and the wisest thing we can do is to return immediately," urged Marguerite, seeing how useless it was to try to proceed further.

"I am subject to vertigo, and I feel very chilly," faintly replied Hugh, shivering perceptibly.

"So do I. Let me assist you, and we will leave this place of mist and shadows."

She led the way, and they soon regained the bank, and were once more in the clear, warm sunshine.

"So, ho!" laughed Mr. Graham. "I thought you would soon get enough of exploring ravines and caverns of that sort. Rheumatism, neuralgia, and ague lurk down there as plentifully and as rankly as do ferns and lichens."

Mr. Fairring speedily recovered from his momentary dizziness, and was disposed to laugh at the sorry failure he had made of his first attempt at sight-seeing.

"You may consider that you have done the Falls," continued Mr. Graham, "or that the Falls have done for you; whichever way you like. It's lucky you had Mrs. Ware for a guide. Had it been Iva, she'd never have brought you back alive. But don't be alarmed. A glass of sherry and water will steady your nerves and counteract the chill."

The sherry and water and a social cigar proving effective, Marguerite left the two "old" gentlemen alone, and rambled off by herself.

Mr. Sloper, meanwhile, was gallantly assisting Miss Kate to clamber over a fallen hemlock, not, however, without some personal inconvenience, for his eye-glasses were all awry, his gloves damp and soiled, and his dear little boots wet and muddy. His foot slipped just as he was in the act of lifting the lady's hand to

his lips, and but for Miss Morris's frantic grasp of his coat-tails, he would have been precipitated into the water head and heels. Her presence of mind alone saved him from so dire a mishap; but she inconsiderately added to her cavalier's discomfiture by laughing until the chasm rang with what Clarence was pleased to term "extremely ill-timed mirth."

Lewis and Iva had wandered off by themselves, and were on the other side of the Falls, away up among the boulders, as fearless as young Nimrod, and as sure-footed as Alpine goats.

"I must have those beautiful ferns growing up there in that crevice, Mr. Hallack. Just see how lovely they are, and so high—almost beyond your reach."

"And you must have them because you think the place where they grow inaccessible?"

"Certainly. A woman always wants what she believes to be unattainable."

Iva stood on the rock looking up at the coveted ferns, a basket half-full of mosses and water-plants in her hand, and her eyes fairly dancing with pleasure. Lewis, at the imminent risk of a ducking, secured the ferns, and she received them with a smile which he thought amply repaid him for his trouble.

"You shall not go unrewarded. These pretty ferns are to deck our dinner-table; and you shall have a bit of chicken and a sandwich by and by, when we return to the upper world. I like the sound of the ceaseless boom and plunge of the water, don't you? How angrily it seethes around the roots of those sturdy old hemlocks," pointing to three fine trees which stood in the midst of the rushing flood.

"You are not taking cold, are you? It's like an ice-house down here," was Lewis's anxious and irrelevant rejoinder.

"I never took cold in my life."

"But that is no reason to suppose that you never will."

"It is a good reason—Gracious! how slippery that stone is!"

"And how summarily it interrupted the flow of your eloquence. An inch more, and you would have tumbled plump into the pool below; and the water is both deep and cool down there, Miss Graham, I can tell you."

"You caught me just in the nick of time. Oh, dear! I never knew I had a heart before. It's in my throat; and it doesn't belong there, I'm sure."

"Now, you rash girl, stand here in this safe

place, or you will be drowned as certain as fate. You have ferns enough to trim forty picnic tables. Come, put them in the basket, and we will go and see what the opposite side of this fathomless abyss has to offer in the way of ferny wonders."

They strolled along till they came to a high rock, fringed all round with wood-creepers and trailing arbutus vines. It struck Iva as being an excellent place to sit down and arrange her mosses, and she was ever a girl to take advantage of anything which gave promise of adding to her individual comfort.

"Oh, isn't it lovely to be alive!" she exclaimed, in a burst of thankfulness. "I would n't be dead for anything to-day."

She looked very beautiful sitting there on the rock, with the sunshine flickering through the leaves on her bonny head and playing over her dimpled white fingers, which were *so* busy with those delectable ferns and mosses.

"No; I can't say as I'd like to be dead. It is pleasant to live, even if we are not quite happy," said Lewis, gravely.

"And why are you not quite happy, sir knight of the sorrowful countenance?"

"Well, I don't know. Our thoughts get the better of us sometimes, and go scampering off as they have no business to do."

"Indeed! And where have yours been scampering, may I ask?"

"To Somerton."

"One might think of a worse place."

"I often think of the day we sat on a gray old stone beside the Juniata, and you said—what did you say, Miss Graham?"

"Something sensible, I'm sure, for I never say anything else," growing very rosy all of a sudden. "How long ago is it since that day?"

"Have you forgotten?"

"I have a poor head for remembering dates," she replied, evasively.

"It were better for me, perhaps, if I were equally forgetful; but, unfortunately, I remember that day only too well. It was two years and a half ago. I remember the proud flash of your eyes, and the scornful curl of your lip. You silenced me with a look, and without giving me an opportunity to speak."

"Because you were not what I wished you to be—what you must be, before I could look other than I did. 'Two years and a half ago' were at the time a part of your life un-lived."

"But now?"

"Oh, now! Why they are the loveliest

mosses that ever grew in the hemlock's shade; see!" She held up an emerald bunch for him to admire, but Lewis would not be turned from his purpose.

"How would it be now, if I should 'dare to presume' again? That's what you said then, 'dare to presume.'"

"It would be;" she paused, dropped the moss, and put her little hand in his—it was a trifle stained and smelled of the earth. "It would be a very proper thing to seriously reflect upon."

"You really think so?"

"Only, if the ideal lady should appear afterward, it would be rather awkward."

"I believe I have already found my ideal lady, if she would but look up and not be so absorbingly interested in those wretched ferns and things. I want to read my answer in your eyes. Do you love me, Iva?"

"Yes; and I did then, only you were not what I ought to love—that is, I was afraid you would n't ever be good."

He kissed the pretty mouth in a way Sloper would not have approved of had he been there to witness it; and with his arm about her slender waist, he said, looking down in the dark, bright eyes,—

"Now, who do you think it was that gave me my first start in life, and saw some promise of good in me, though Iva Graham could not?"

"It never occurred to me that anybody did. I thought you were the architect of your own fortune. That's not an original expression, but it covers the ground."

"So I am to a certain extent; but it's not so easy to get a foothold in the world when you have neither money nor friends, and the very girl you love better than you do your life doesn't believe in you."

"You are very unkind. Your friend was—"

"Marguerite."

"Mrs. Ware?"

"Yes; Marguerite Ware. She lent me money. I repaid it long ago; but the hope, the confidence, the will and the purpose she instilled into my heart, her generous, open-handed, large-souled sympathy, and the kindly way she brought me to the notice of Mr. Zeverley, are debts which I can never liquidate, though I were to live three times the number of years allotted the life of man."

Iva was looking up at her lover, now, through a mist of remorseful tears.

"What a miserable, selfish, little wretch I

must have appeared to you—so different from Marguerite. But if I did have a flashing eye and a scornful lip, I thought a good deal of you, and—and I think you knew it, Lewis."

"I came to after awhile; but it cut me to the very soul *then*."

"Oh, wicked me! Yet I only wanted—"

"You wanted your husband to be a man, and not an idle, ne'er-do-well of a corner-lounger."

"That's just it. If I had known how, I'd have reformed you, indeed I would," in a deeply penitent tone. "It seemed such a hopeless task at the time; but after you went away, and I heard of you doing so well, I grew vain, and was so foolish as to suppose that for love of me you were trying to win for yourself an honorable name; and, if the future should redeem the past, I'd surely not have acted unwisely."

"I did not blame you for despising me. I was a graceless scamp, and no mistake."

"When you came home that Christmas-time, and treated me so very formally, I felt confident you would love Agnes and forget me. And Marguerite was her friend, too. How sad it is that Mrs. Ware, who seems destined to help other people out of their difficulties, should be herself so unhappy. And she met Mr. Ware at Cedarcroft. That's the worst of it. Ill-starred was the day Wilfred invited him to Somerton. But come, I hear Cousin Clary calling me, and time and dinner wait for no one."

Iva hastily gathered up her hat and parasol and the basket with the precious ferns, and Lewis helped her down the bank the little help she needed, for she was light of foot as a deer, and sprang from stone to stone with the grace and ease of a bird. The opposite bank proved a trifling more tedious; but she gained the summit in safety, and was met by a storm of questions.

"My goodness, how rosy you are!" cried Mrs. Rowley. "We were half frozen when we reached the top, and had no color at all."

"And the dinner waiting, and we as hungry as wolves," said Kate, reproachfully.

"And I bellowing myself hoarse calling you," put in Sloper, scowling at Lewis.

"It will do you good to exercise your lungs, my gentle cousin. I did hear something that sounded like the distant braying of a disconsolate donkey. Could it have been you, Clary?"

Iva slipped around to Mr. Fairring's side of the table, for where lovers were concerned he was the dearest, most undiscerning, and innocent of men.

"We came up the bank pretty fast, and I nearly lost my breath, which is better than losing my heart, you know. Are not these mosses exquisite? This is for the butter-dish and the jelly-bowl. Your sherry bottle, papa, must have a necklace of ferns. My walk gave me a fearful appetite. A sandwich, if you please, mamma, and a bit of cold chicken."

Mrs. Rowley looked at Iva suspiciously as she helped herself to pickled oysters for the second time. Lewis modestly contented himself with bread and butter, and asked Mr. Fairring what he thought of the iron interests of Pennsylvania as compared to that of the great grain-growing centres of the West. The unsuspecting old gentleman replied, as he sipped sparingly of his sherry and water, "that for obvious reasons a high protective tariff was the life and soul of Pennsylvania, with her vast coal and iron interests, while the West, on the other hand, would undoubtedly be largely benefited by unlimited free trade."

Mr. Hallack quite agreed with him. Marguerite smiled knowingly at this little by-play, whereupon Iva deliberately laid down her chicken wing, and, without stopping to avail herself of a napkin, put a hand on either side of Mrs. Ware's face and gave her a hearty kiss.

"There! that's for you, and no questions asked, you dearest woman under the sun!"

Mr. Fairring looked greatly puzzled, as did everybody else. Mrs. Graham remonstrated in a scandalized tone, "Iva, I am ashamed of you." But the indulgent old father merely said, with a humorous uplifting of his gray eyebrows,—

"Daughter, remember your prayers, and lead us not into temptation."

"Oh, Marguerite knows what it means." And Iva coolly resumed her chicken wing.

Sloper stared. "'Pon honor, beastly obscure; can't make it out at all!"

"Bless me! my dear Clary; I never expected that you would."

"Iva, child, how you do run on; and you are quite neglecting Mr. Hallack. I am sure he has had nothing," chided Mrs. Graham.

Lewis declared he was doing very well; he did not feel in the least neglected. Amid much merry talk the dinner was finished; and Marguerite began putting the dishes again in the hampers.

"We are likely to be favored with a fine sunset, and, if we would enjoy it in all its splendor, we must return early."

Mr. Fairring gave her a grateful glance. He had been longing for some one to propose an early start, for, beside being tired, the mountain air was growing chilly, which made it desirable for him to get home before dark.

In half an hour the first carriage drove off with its load of weary picnickers, leaving Mr. Fairring, Marguerite, Lewis, and Iva to follow in the second. Hugh, of course, fell to Marguerite's care, and occupied the seat next to her. A very fortunate circumstance, he thought, and appreciated too, for, when the lap-robés were tucked snugly around him, he leaned back in his corner of the carriage with a sigh of great contentment.

"I do believe there is a storm coming up," said Iva, as a low rumbling of distant thunder echoed sullenly among the hills; "and a storm at this height is a serious matter, I am told."

Lewis looked apprehensively at a bank of densely black clouds in the west, from behind which the setting sun threw long, quivering tongues of lurid light.

"It does look rather threatening; but it may blow over. Thunder-storms are common enough in this region, and there is no occasion for being alarmed," he said, more for the purpose of tranquillizing Iva's fears than anything else.

A sudden puff of wind swept down from the mountain and set the topmost branches of the tall pines to rocking as if they had already felt the coming of the tempest — bending and moaning before it like living creatures who knew that Nature was preparing for a grand display of her mightiest forces.

"And to think my picnic should end in a whirlwind," bewailed Iva; "and our beautiful sunset be lost in a fierce, black battlement of clouds that intend us no good, if their angry hurrying here and there and piling one above the other means anything."

"Shall I pull up?" asked Wilson, as careful a driver as ever sat on a coach-box. "There's a dangersome bit of road just ahead, and it's growing darker and darker every minute."

"No; drive on," replied Sloper, impatiently. "Do you want us all to be drenched to the skin? Just give the nags a touch of the whip, and we can reach the valley before it has time to overtake us. Egad! how the trees are tossing. It's going to be a regular old blow. Drive on, and we'll outspeed the storm."

"I don't think so, sir," respectfully dissented Wilson. "A storm is no joke in these parts; and with a bad road and darkness to contend with, I'd not like to venture it. We might find shelter under this shelving rock, if it be your pleasure to stop. It's pretty much all down hill from here to the creek; and if anything should break, we'd be likely to fare badly."

"Perhaps we had better take your advice, driver," said Lewis. "A wetting is a less serious matter than a smash-up."

"Oh, hang your smash-up! Go on. Who wants to —"

A terrific clap of thunder abruptly silenced Sloper's further objections, and was followed by a dazzling sheet of fire that lit up the forest for miles around with its blinding brightness. In the twinkling of an eye a huge hemlock-tree, not ten feet from the horses' heads, was shivered from top to bottom. Iva shrieked. Marguerite sat perfectly still. The lightning, for a single instant, had shown a face, fair and as unmoved as if cut in marble, turned in mute resignation towards that frowning canopy of fire-riven clouds in the west which seemed to lower and darken with every passing moment. The horses, mad with terror, sprang forward, wild and almost unmanageable. But Wilson knew his business, and pulled with all his might. Another flash. The horses were off like a shot. For a quarter of a mile they kept the road, dashing on through the inky blackness at an appalling pace. Then came the final break. The carriage, with its terrified occupants, plunged over the bank, and five human beings were instantly buried beneath its fragments. Fortunately, the driver escaped unhurt, and one by one he succeeded in extricating his bruised and trembling passengers from the wreck of the broken carriage. Neither Sloper nor Lewis was much hurt. Iva had received no further injury than a sprained ankle, and Marguerite — her arm was cut and bleeding, and a few drops of warm, red blood were slowly making their way through the wavy masses of her brown hair, but she saw only the white, unconscious face of Hugh Fairring as some one held a flickering light above it, and heard Lewis say, in a voice of infinite compassion, "Poor fellow, he is dead, I fear!"

"Dead!" Marguerite's pale lips repeated the word vaguely.

Was it really true that Hugh Fairring was dead?

CHAPTER XXII.

What's in the air?—

Some subtle spirit runs through all my veins;
Hope seems to ride this morning on the wind,
And joy outshines the sun.

PROCTOR.

IT is difficult to say who of the unfortunate picnic party were the most frightened. All were more or less stunned and bruised, but Marguerite alone was seriously hurt. Mr. Fairring was rendered unconscious by the shock, but otherwise had sustained little injury. The worst had befallen Mrs. Ware, for the reason that, the moment she saw the danger, she had quietly, and without his being at all aware of her purpose, changed places with Mr. Fairring. She knew, if the carriage upset, it must fall on the side occupied by Hugh, and if not killed outright, the shock, in his poor state of health, if added to broken bones, might prove fatal.

For many days Marguerite lay very ill in her darkened chamber in Colonnade Row, but she was young, and naturally of a strong constitution, and when she returned to Somerton, late in September, she was quite well again, and no one to look at her would have thought that she had been so near to death since she had left The Maples.

"A gentleman to see you, Miss Marguerite," said old Jeannette, conducting into the library, where her mistress was sitting, a neatly-dressed, delicately-featured gentleman. "Mr. Fairring!" Marguerite was never more surprised, but she arose and cordially gave him her hand. He took it in both of his, and his agitation was so marked as to attract the attention of Jeannette, who moralized in this wise as she silently withdrew,—

"He's not a lawyer, anyway, for they have no feeling; and it's plain to be seen he's fond of Miss Marguerite."

"You are no doubt surprised to see me; but I had some business in this part of the State which made it necessary for me to pass through Somerton, and I thought I'd call and see you," said Hugh, still holding her hand and looking his pleasure.

"And I am very glad that you did. You will find Somerton at its best in September, and you could not have chosen a pleasanter time of the year for your visit. There are only little Louise and myself to welcome you to The Maples, but you may find our company more tolerable than being alone at your hotel."

"I wish I might always have such pleasant company," he replied, just as Louise came flying in, eager and breathless from the haste she had made.

"You did come to see my mountains and my trees, Mr. Fairring, you really did," she cried, springing into his arms and nestling her rosy cheek against his pale, gentle face.

"You painted your home and its surroundings in such alluring colors that I could not resist the temptation to come and see it for myself."

This was a little beyond Louise's comprehension, but she sturdily maintained her ground.

"I did tell the truf; did n't I, aunty? I'll show you my swing and my dollies, but my kitties have growed into big, big cats, and they scratch me now when I pull their tails, and I've got two white chickens."

She slipped from his arms, and ran out of the room, returning a moment thereafter with four battered dolls of different sizes, and in various stages of dilapidation, and proudly laid them on the floor at Mr. Fairring's feet.

"This is Nellie. She's lost most all her hair, and one foot; but I love her best, for she is the one my mamma gave me ever so long ago. This is Polly, my next oldest, and she has n't any nose, and only one arm; and Tillie —she's got joints, and you can sit her down so, and she won't tumble over till you want her to," planting Miss Tillie bolt upright on Mr. Fairring's knee, where Sue, her youngest, already reposed, face downwards, in very great disarray. "Come, now, and see my swing; you, too, aunty."

"If you are not too tired, perhaps you would like to go?" said Marguerite. "And I wil have luncheon served under the elm-tree."

Go? He would go anywhere. All he cared for was to be near her.

Lunch was set out in Jeannette's very best style on a little round table beneath the noble old elm. Louise finished her repast in a hurry, as she usually did, and ran away to feed her pet chickens.

"Oh, there you are: I've been looking everywhere for you," cried Miss Graham, coming upon them unaware. "And Mr. Fairring, too. How delightful! Just arrived, of course?"

"Yes; and Mrs. Ware was so kind as to ask me to remain to luncheon."

"And you will dine with us to-morrow? Hotels are such unsocial places. No, thank you, Marguerite, I've been to lunch; but I'll

take some of those grapes, such purple beauties as they are," said Iva, helping herself to the fragrant muscatels. She rattled on for an hour in this strain, and climaxed her leave-taking by remarking, as she ruthlessly pulled to pieces a yellow honeysuckle,—

"I suppose you know there will be no Miss Iva Graham after next week; and you must stay to the wedding, Mr. Fairring."

"Indeed I will, and happy and long may your married life be. I presume the fortunate man is the Mr. Hallack you went fern-hunting with at Beaver Falls?"

"The very same. Ah, that was a fatal day for me," sighed she.

Marguerite said she must go and see a sick child whose parents lived not far from Cedarcroft. Mr. Fairring had a letter to write, and with Mrs. Ware's permission, he would make himself at home in the library until she returned. This of course was assented to, and Marguerite and Iva went away together.

Hugh finished his letter, and as the place was so quiet and his chair so comfortable, he soon fell asleep, and did not awaken for two hours. Marguerite returned and found him there asleep in her father's great crimson-cushioned easy-chair, a white, delicate hand lying restfully on either arm, and his face wearing the peaceful aspect of a slumbering child. How often, oh, how often! she had seen her father sleeping like that in that self-same room. She went out softly, and did not disturb him.

Hugh was rather ashamed of his long nap, and when fully aroused and conscious of the length of time he had been asleep, he hastily repaired to the sitting-room, where he found Mrs. Ware and Louise deep in the exciting amusement of building a card-house.

"I think there must be something remarkably somnific about the air of Somerton, for I find I've been asleep a good two hours."

"Yes," spoke up Louise. "And when I peeped in, as still as a mouse, on my tip-toes, you were fast asleep; and you looked just like my grandpapa used to, who is dead, and does n't live here any more."

"You were to make yourself at home, you know," replied Marguerite, putting a silencing finger on Louise's prattling mouth. "Every one does that at The Maples."

Mr. Fairring shortly afterwards took his leave, promising to call again soon, and the following day he dined with the Grahams at Cedarcroft. Mr. Sloper was not present, that gentleman

having gone off to Lake George in a huff, and vowing, by all the saints in the calendar, that he'd not remain at Somerton and see Iva throw herself away on "that Hallack fellow."

How it was ever done will forever remain a mystery; but Iva managed in some way to bring her father around, and the paternal blessing was given heartily, though the maternal hung fire for awhile, and was rather lukewarm when it did come.

"We are to lose our sunbeam very soon," remarked Mr. Graham to his guest, as they sat on the porch enjoying their after-dinner cigar. "Hallack is a sensible, go-ahead business man; and that's what I like. I don't believe in pampering children too much; it makes them indolent and very frequently insolent. I said to my daughter, when she came to me about it, 'Take the young man, if you love him; but build your own nest.' Living with and being dependent on his wife's folks will spoil the best husband in creation. They have no responsibility, so far as providing for a family is concerned, and soon learn to shirk household expenses as well as household cares. Therefore, I tell my daughters they must be satisfied with such homes as their husbands are able to provide for them, or remain single."

"You are right," replied Mr. Fairring, earnestly. "It is a great mistake for a father, no matter how rich he may be, to assume the responsibility of supporting a son-in-law's family. I speak as one not without experience, and know it to be a grave error. We old people must leave them sometime to take care of themselves, and, for their own good, they should begin to do so while we are living."

"Exactly so; and for that reason I am going to let Iva put her shoulder to the wheel at the beginning, and commence the battle of life on her own strength and not mine."

"And very hard-hearted of you, too," said Miss Iva, coming in at that moment; "and to pay you for it, I hope you will miss me morning, noon, and night, and all the time between, and be ready to cry whenever you call Iva and no Iva answers to her name."

"I shall miss you, my daughter, my sunlight, my first-born baby girl."

"Dear, dear papa!" She put a loving arm about his neck and lifted up her winsome face to be kissed. "And I shall miss you also, dear, darling, old papa!"

Hugh Fairring turned away his head that they might not see the tears which filled his

eyes. Ah, this was a daughter's love. How different from the thing he called by the name, and tried to make himself believe was the same.

"Lewis and I are not quite beggars," resumed Iva, burying her snow-drop of a hand in her father's military whiskers. "Uncle Allen gave me ten thousand dollars for my wedding present. And we are not going to live in a cabin, nor yet in a tent, but in a very substantial brick house, with six rooms beside the kitchen and coal-cellars. There will be no conservatories nor pleasure grounds; but, I dare say, we can manage to get along for awhile with window plants. Love has been known to survive such an ordeal, and perhaps it may again. We do not expect to keep a carriage for sometime yet, and only one 'help'; but I am an excellent pedestrian, and can walk if I cannot ride; and if the 'help' leaves suddenly without giving notice, I can get a cold dinner; and if warmed with a smile, it will be both appetizing and satisfactory. I am young and strong, and full of hope," drawing up her slender figure to its full height, "and I love my love, and so, I dare say, I'll be happy."

"And you deserve to be," said Mr. Fairring, warmly. "And may the passing years keep the hope and the love bright and shining."

"There are to be no presents, because I want all my friends to be at the wedding, and have a good time; and then, you know, neither Lewis nor myself will have any use for seventeen hundred berry-dishes and a thousand butter-knives."

"And a good time you shall have, my wise little lady. You shall leave your father's house in a blaze of glory. Cedarcroft shall be one vast illumination from turret to bastion stone, and you shall have all your friends, rich and poor, around you to wish you god-speed and a happy journey through life," cried the old gentleman, enthusiastically.

"And you are the cruel father who, but a moment ago, was to set me adrift on the sea of matrimony, and see me starve before you would lend a helping hand to me or mine. Now go and show Mr. Fairring the graperies and your beloved paddocks, for I know you both have had enough of me."

And away she ran as merry as a cricket.

"It seems to be a very pleasant life you lead here?" said Hugh, after they had visited the magnificent graperies and the paddocks, where some very long-legged colts and small, mild-eyed Jersey cows were quietly feeding.

"Yes; I like it. I have two sons already in business for themselves, and lots of little ones yet in the nursery. The colts are thoroughbreds, every one of them; and as to those Jerseys, their pedigree is to be seen at a glance," rejoined Mr. Graham, getting the inmates of the nursery and the paddocks considerably mixed up. Mr. Fairring was delighted with everything he saw, and above all was he pleased with his genial, whole-souled entertainer. He returned to his hotel in high spirits, more than ever convinced that Somerton was really a very charming place, and the people the most hospitable in the world.

The next day, while on his way to The Maples, Mr. Fairring saw approaching him a basket phaeton, in which was seated a solitary figure driving a sorrel horse, whose gait was so slow and measured as to make it doubtful if the animal were moving at all. The phaeton's solitary occupant was Marguerite—the sorrel horse Borak, an ancient equine, with no pedigree to boast of and no special claims to beauty. Caleb said it was "nigh on to ten years since Borak had been known to go faster than a walk," and this was probably true, judging by his present snail-like pace.

Mrs. Ware stopped, and invited Mr. Fairring to a seat beside her.

"I am going my charitable rounds," she explained, smiling. "When I am in a hurry, I always walk; but to-day, having a little time to spare, I concluded to drive Borak. He is slow, but very trusty. You can leave him anywhere, and he'll not wander far away."

"I should say not. He seems to be of a staid, equable temperament," replied Hugh.

They drove for an hour along the pleasant country roads, past meadows, and cornfields, and patches of ripening buckwheat, till the higher lands on the opposite side of the river were gained, and the lovely Somerton valley lay before them in all its still September beauty.

It was the aftermath of life with him, and the more precious therefore were these passing glimpses of summer's departing glories. A man may be past his prime, and yet feel the need of loving and of being loved. The heart may long ago have ceased to be "hot and restless;" but while it beats, it must beat for some one nearer and dearer than all others, and this other, if not already found, Hugh Fairring was dangerously near discovering.

Borak evidently knew his mistress, for he made nothing of going from one side of the

road to the other, and snatching a mouthful of grass here and there whenever he saw a bunch sufficiently tempting to induce him to make so great an exertion. So far from being rebuked, Marguerite seemed to view it as a part of Borak's duty to help himself to the good things of this world, and she might well say that she walked instead of rode when she was in a hurry.

"You see the little house yonder on the hill," observed Mrs. Ware. "There is where we are going."

When they reached the house in question, Borak, of his own volition, drew up to the gate and stopped stone-still. A woman, with a thin-faced baby in her arms, opened the door.

"How is Kitty to-day, Mrs. Miller?" asked Marguerite, as she alighted, and followed by Hugh entered the house.

"No better, Miss Marguerite. She had a bad night, and has been fretting for you all day."

On a bed in one corner of the room lay a little misshapen creature, with great hollow eyes and pale sunken cheeks, who reached out to Marguerite a wee, puny hand and smiled, oh, such a smile of love and gratitude. Mrs. Ware put back the soft hair and kissed tenderly the wan little face.

"I have brought you something nice. Louise sent you this nice dolly—little Miss Cherry Cheeks. See!" holding it up to view. "Is n't she fine? And here are some oranges, and two pretty new story-books."

"You have brought me something better than all these, dear Miss Marguerite; for you have brought me yourself."

"Herself!" Hugh felt his heart echo the child's simple words. "Something better than everything else—herself."

"What think you of my little Kitty?" asked Mrs. Ware, when they were again seated in the phaeton, and Borak was pleased to go on. "She has lain there three years, just as sweet and patient as you saw her to-day. You would not think it to look at her, but Kitty is nearly twelve years old, and has been afflicted with spinal disease from her infancy. I have another pensioner living not far from this. That is old mother Green's cabin you see there to the right, or you could see it if it were not for that scraggy row of intervening locust trees. She is rheumatic, and a sort of human barometer as regards the weather. Her temper is never any of the best; but, as it is a fine day, I hope to find her in an amiable mood."

Marguerite's respectful rap on the low, dingy door elicited from a querulous voice within a somewhat curt permission to enter. Nor was mother Green disposed to be any the more civil because Mrs. Ware happened to be accompanied by a stranger.

"So you have come at last," she said, sharply. "I looked for you yesterday and the day afore; but old eyes can look, and that's all the good it does 'em when one is poor and of no account in the world."

"I am very sorry to have disappointed you. But how is your rheumatism?"

"As troublesome as ever; and the tea is out," hobbling across the floor, and taking from a little closet above the mantle-piece an empty tea-caddy. "Not a grain left."

"I have not forgotten the tea, and you will find the usual amount of things in the basket. Jeannette seldom forgets to put in what you need."

"Yes, she does. She forgot the poundcake last time, and I like poundcake," tartly reminded old mother Green. "The tea was inferior before, and so was the flour. I don't like my tea and flour to be poor stuff, and never did."

They left rather hurriedly, and when Borak was again in motion, Marguerite extenuatingly remarked,—

"Mother Green seems a queer kind of creature until one gets used to her ways."

"I believe you said, the wind not being in the east, we would be likely to find mother Green in an amiable mood," replied Hugh.

"Oh, you found her quite affable to what she is sometimes."

"Then heaven help the one who ventures near her when the wind *is* in the east, if what I have just witnessed be a specimen of her amiability."

"But you must remember that she is a great sufferer, lives entirely alone, and naturally gets soured by her loneliness. Her temper is a real comfort to her; for, if the poor soul were to be deprived of the privilege of grumbling at each and every one who comes near her, she would not live a week; and so I charitably forgive what you no doubt deem her glaring lack of gratitude," laughed Marguerite.

When they reached the little gate that led up to the cemetery, Borak stopped, and calmly began to crop the short grass growing by the roadside.

"We must get out, for he will not go another step unless we do. He knows I always stop

here, and you see how promptly he reminds me of it. Borak is a very intelligent animal."

"Very intelligent, indeed! Fortunately, we are not in a hurry. I wish this afternoon would last forever."

"But it will not, for even now the shadows are growing long."

"Too long for me."

His hand was on her arm, and a something of indescribable tenderness and regret in his voice. They walked to the spot where Borak stood composedly nipping the wayside herbage, resumed their places in the phaeton, and did not speak again until they drew up at Mrs. Hallack's cottage. The old lady was at the gate waiting to receive them, she having seen Borak coming while yet afar off, and his leisurely, haphazard, stop-or-go habits gave her ample time to put on her best cap and a freshly-ironed apron.

"Mr. Fairring, let me present you to Mrs. Hallack, Lewis's mother, and my very good friend."

After the usual commonplaces were exchanged, Mrs. Hallack volunteered the information, which she had been for many weeks "making up her mind to,"—

"I am goin' to the weddin', but not to the reception that I hear is to be at Cedarcroft. I'll see my boy married, God bless him, and the bonny bride he's chosen! but I'd be out of place among the grand Graham folks, though he's not ashamed of me, nor is the girl, so far as I know; but I am not of their kind. Lewis wanted to have the old house fixed up, and new blinds and new furniture, but I wouldn't hear to it. I like the homely old things that I'm used to. It wouldn't seem like home to have everything new all at once. But will you not come in, Miss Marguerite?"

"Not this afternoon. Borak, you know, is a slow quadruped, and it is getting late. So good-by till the wedding."

Twenty minutes later Marguerite sat Mr. Fairring down at his hotel, and Borak languidly resumed his funereal march towards The Maples.

Iva's marriage, if not consummated in a blaze of glory, was a very brilliant affair, and the good wishes for her future happiness were as hearty as they were numerous.

The day subsequent to the wedding, Hugh called to bid Marguerite farewell.

"I have had such a pleasant time here, Mrs. Ware, you can't tell how I dread the thought of returning home," he said, with the old weary, restless look again in his eyes.

"And that is a very wrong feeling to cherish," she rejoined. "When all else is gone, there is still duty left; and doing one's duty is, in itself, a never-ending source of consolation."

"I have done many things solely from a sense of duty which went cruelly against my inclinations, but never did the doing so bring me an hour's happiness."

"You have had a sad experience."

"Both a sad and an unfortunate one," he answered, bitterly.

"The darkest cloud has still its silver lining. By-and-by, somewhere, in some way, there will come peace. Be patient, and learn that hardest of all lessons, to conquer yourself."

"Be patient! Have I not been patient? I leave peace and happiness with you, for there is none where I go."

"Happiness and I parted company long, long since."

"Then what is this which sustains you now, and makes you in all things a woman of might?"

"Duty — nothing more," she smiled.

And this was their parting.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Some characters are like some bodies in chemistry — very good, perhaps, in themselves, yet fly off and refuse the least conjunction with each other.

LORD GRENVILLE.

FOR some reason best known to herself, Mr. Fairring's visit to Somerton filled the mind of Mrs. Hurston, his adopted daughter, with many disquieting thoughts. She did not like it. Who was this Mrs. Ware whom she had heard Mrs. Rowley speak of on more than one occasion in terms of unqualified praise, to be sure, but praise which Mrs. Hurston deemed pernicious and little deserved. Some odious, designing person, no doubt, and she privately determined to "put a stop to it," whatever putting a stop to it might mean.

Mrs. Fairring had been for nobody knew how many years an "invalid." She was a tall, angular woman, with large, coarse features, heavy jaws, and thin, iron-gray hair. Her long bony hands were the color of old mahogany, and her false teeth of dead white porcelain seemed horribly even and unreal in comparison to the rest of her gaunt, sallow body.

The Fairrings occupied a lordly brown-stone front in a fashionable street; but it is safe to say

it contained more domestic bickering, more quarrelling, and more conjugal misery than any ten houses ordinarily do. Hurston wrangled with his wife, the servants quarrelled with each other, the children fought and disputed alternately, and Mrs. Fairring whimpered the most of the time, and had "spells," which would have been alarming if she had not been having them regularly every day for at least a dozen years.

She had just recovered from a spell, and lay moaning on the bed in the dismal way she had long habituated herself to, while a little flaxen-haired girl of five, the black sheep of the Hurston flock, lay on a sofa in the opposite corner of the room sobbing piteously. Mrs. Hurston was in one of her tempers, and her tempers were certain to be accompanied by loud lamentations in the nursery, fainting fits on the part of the invalid, and a contentious uplifting of voices in the kitchen. The Fairring and Hurston servants were always at swords' points. Pitched battles were of frequent occurrence, and both parties, so to speak, slept on their arms.

When dinner is late, the sound of a husband's latch-key grates ominously on the ear of a tired wife. Mr. Hurston happened to be distressingly punctual on this particular occasion, and found his lady in no humor to be asked if dinner were ready. No, dinner was not ready. The potatoes had only just commenced to boil. What did he think a woman was made of, with children everlastingly around under one's feet, and a parcel of saucy, stupid servants whom one could neither trust nor teach anything, and were made, it did seem to her, for no other reason than to worry the life and soul out of one.

Servants are quick to see and quick to take advantage of their employers' domestic difficulties. That very morning, Ellen, "the up-stairs girl," had demanded her wages, packed up her belongings, and majestically left the house; but not before she had given her mistress a piece of her mind. From this promising beginning the storm grew until it became a perfect cyclone, demolishing and scattering everything and everybody before it.

Ellen departed with her boxes, glorying in the thought that she had had the last word. Bridget, the cook, sulked the whole morning, and poor little Nannie, for some childish misdemeanor, was severely punished by her angry mother, and sent howling up-stairs.

Mr. Fairring came home in the midst of the

uproar to find his wife in tears, as usual, and another "spell" imminent.

"How is it your nurse is not here to attend you?" he asked, in a tone of utter dejection.

"Ellen left this morning, and I sent Nora down to help with the dinner," she replied, groaning hysterically.

"Laurie has been quarrelling with the servants again, I suppose. It were better for a man to be dead than to live such a life as this."

"I'm sure I wish I were dead. There is little *I* have to live for."

"Or any of us," moodily rejoined her husband.

"What is the matter with you, Nannie?" taking the child on his knee and putting back from her tear-filled eyes her tumbled hair.

"Mamma slapped me, and made my ear ache; and I did n't do anything naughty at all," sobbed Nannie. "She does n't love me, mamma does n't; nor papa, nor anybody."

"I love you, dear, and wish you had as happy a home as the little girl has I saw at Somerton last week. She had neither father nor mother, but she did not lack for love, and was happy and merry all the day long."

"What was the little girl's name?"

"Louise; and she has black eyes and rosy cheeks, and the lady she lives with loves her very much."

"And never slaps her?" replies Nannie, enviously.

"No; for she is a wise, patient woman, and knows how to make little children good without punishing them."

"Do you love the lady, too, grandpapa?"

The blood mounted hotly to Hugh Fairring's temples. Did he love Marguerite? The child's innocent question was one he could not answer.

Nannie was too full of her own troubles to notice his agitation.

"Ellen says you are not my grandpapa, that you are not my mamma's papa, and it's all make believe, and we are not anything -- only badness. She *did* tell me so."

He hastily put down the child and walked to the window. Nora fortunately came in at the moment and saved Mr. Fairring the disagreeable necessity of replying. Ellen, mean and cruel as it was, had told poor Nannie the truth. It was he who all these years had been acting a lie, and now stood face to face with the falsehood, condemned by a child's innocent eyes, stabbed to the quick by a child's unconscious hand.

A dinner presided over by Mrs. Hurston was never a very enjoyable meal; but to-day it seemed to be seasoned more than common with frigid looks and acrid personalities.

Mr. Hurston stood it until the fish was being removed, when his patience gave out. He threw down his napkin, grabbed his hat, and left the house by way of the basement stairs, as Ellen and her boxes had done some hours previously; only *he* did not have the last word, but had to content himself with slamming the door — a tremendous slam, that made the alabaster vase in the vestibule above tremble on its pedestal, and sounded sweet as heavenly music to his marital ears.

"We are not so amiable as your Somerton friends are, I presume?" sarcastically observed Mrs. Hurston, when the noise of the jar had subsided and Frederick's footsteps had ceased to echo on the pavement outside.

"I think it would be impossible to find, either at Somerton or anywhere else, a more unamiable family, or a worse-conducted household than this," he answered, coldly.

"Really! And are we never to see your grand friends? Perhaps some one of them, Mrs. Marguerite Ware, for instance, might be so kind as to teach us good manners. I should particularly like to see that lovely paragon of all the virtues, if Mrs. Rowley is to be believed."

"You would not like her. Mrs. Ware is a lady?"

"Which is to say that *I* am not."

"Which is to say we will change the subject, if you please."

"So I am not allowed to so much as mention the name of this—"

"Silence!" thundered Hugh Fairring, with a look in his eyes that made her tremble. "I will not suffer you to reflect upon the name of any friend of mine, man or woman. *I* am master here, and in future I warn you do not forget it."

He pushed back his chair (Frederick had set a dangerous example) and went out in the hall. Again the door banged, again the alabaster vase trembled, and Hugh Fairring muttered, as he went down the granite steps, "Doing one's duty may be all very well in theory, but to put it in practice is another thing."

In consequence of the pleasing way in which the gentleman had left the dinner-table and the house, Mrs. Fairring had a "spell" of much longer duration than common, taxing all Nora's

powers of strength and persuasion to bring her safely out of it. But brandy, rubbing, and a heartfelt appeal to the saints finally brought her through.

Meanwhile Mrs. Hurston was gloomily nursing her wrath to keep it warm. She did fear Mr. Fairring, but Frederick — she would take this sort of behavior out of him when he came home, or know the reason why. Mr. Fairring returned at tea-time, but Frederick did not. For the time being he had handsomely kicked himself free of the matrimonial traces, "and might as well die for an old sheep as a lamb," as Bridget feelingly put it. Nine, ten, eleven o'clock passed, and still no Frederick appeared. Twelve o'clock struck, and with the low, solemn chimes mingled the sound of unsteady footsteps on the stairs. Mrs. Hurston was on the alert, and ready primed for action.

"Where had he been?"

"At the club, where a man could eat his dinner like a Christian, without a woman's eternal tongue clanging in his ears."

"A pretty place for a married man to spend his time, and pretty language to use towards a wife."

"Wife be hanged! He'd go where he pleased and do as he liked. He'd be tied to no woman's apron-strings. No, by the gods, he would n't!"

"This to me, you wretch! you that had n't a penny in the world when I married you," she retorted, sitting up in bed and angrily shaking her forefinger at the audacious Frederick, who was just tipsy enough to be sublimely ridiculous.

"You are no prize, I can tell you, madam; and I'll be blessed if I don't wish it were some fellow other than me who had married you. Old Fairring's daughter — daughter! ha, ha!"

During this enlivening conversation, Frederick, from mere force of habit, had pulled off his boots, wound up his watch, divested himself of coat, vest, and neck-tie, and when he fired the last shot was fumbling at his collar-button. "I've been your slave, your betty-coddy, your — your — had n't a penny — oh, well, cry if you want to. It will do you good. I like to hear you cry, tra, la, la, la!" sang the exasperating Frederick, pirouetting around the room in his stocking feet.

Sobs from the bed, and an awful silence from the neighborhood of the bureau, where the husband was making his night toilet. Crash! down came a cologne-bottle, demolished by a flying suspender. Redoubled sobs, profounder silence,

and a fragrance as if all the winds of Arabia were blowing through the chamber. Mr. Hurston grimly laid himself down on the very edge of the bed, as far away as possible from his weeping spouse, and fondly fancied her silence might be the blissful forerunner of sleep. Deluded man! It was but the deceitful calm which presages the rapid approach of the storm. The seven vials of wrath were as nothing compared to the scorching reproaches, the bitter invectives, she showered upon his devoted head. It was more than flesh and blood could bear. Frederick flung himself out of bed again, and began to dress, swearing he would leave the house, and she might go to—well, the place was not heaven where he wished her in future to reside. At this stage of the quarrel Mrs. Hurston began to show strong premonitory symptoms of hysteria; but Frederick was firm. Poor came he into the Fairring family, and poor would he go out of it. Yea, neither scrip nor staff would he take, nor anything that had about it the appearance of Hugh Fairring's bounty. He dressed himself expeditiously yet carefully, even to the extent of putting on a light spring overcoat,—and a man does look awfully in earnest in a high silk hat and a light spring overcoat after midnight when his threat to "leave" echoes dismally through the house, and falls like the crack of doom on the ear of his terrified wife. Would he really go? She heard the front door open and shut. She flew to the window, threw up the sash and looked out. Merciful heaven! there he stood on the granite step—her Frederick! She saw herself a deserted wife and her children fatherless!

The oppressive silence, and, more than all, the damp night air, had a most chilling effect upon Mr. Hurston's stern determination to "leave," and considerably cooled his anger.

Mrs. Hurston flew down-stairs penitent and imploring.

"Dearest Frederick, would you break my heart? Would you—could you desert your children? Come back, my dearest love, come back!"

It did not take much persuasion to induce him to relinquish his desperate purpose. In fact, he rather anticipated some such *denouement*, and waited on the step outside just long enough to fill the soul of his wife with penitence and despair.

The costly bronze clock on the parlor mantle struck two. The victorious Frederick followed his subdued lady up-stairs, laid aside his spring

overcoat, somewhat sheepishly, it must be confessed, and peace reigned once more in the princely Fairring mansion.

The subsequent day, however, proved a peculiarly depressing one to every member of the family. Mrs. Hurston looked deeply injured, and was circumspectly polite to her husband, who, in the broad light of day, was rather ashamed of last night's exploit. And Mr. Fairring, who had heard every word of the disgraceful jangle, emphasized his displeasure by leaving the house immediately after breakfast, dining at his club; at least, he did not dine at home, and spending the evening nobody knew how or where. It was after midnight when he reached his own door, and let himself in with his latch-key. He passed through his wife's chamber on the way to his room. One long, yellow hand lay outstretched on the counterpane, and on the stand at the head of the bed, in a silver cup half-full of water, grinned the porcelain teeth. His home! He found it in his heart to turn his back upon it, and never enter its walls again. What were fine carpets, curtains, marbles, frescoes, damask, and buhl to compensate one for wretchedness and misery like this? He thought of the love and peace that dwelt at The Maples; of bright, happy little Louise; of fair, gentle Marguerite. But why think of her? *She* was married, and the poor creature lying there on the bed, with yellow hands and palsied limbs—who had been lying there in just that way for more than seventeen years—was *his wife*!

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Past and Present here unite
Beneath Time's flowing tide,
Like footprints hidden by a brook,
But seen on either side. LONGFELLOW.

THE tenth of January found Mrs. Ware and the Grahams at Washington, where a week later Thorndyce and his wife and Mr. and Mrs. Hallack joined them. Marguerite came in the parlor, one evening, dressed for Mrs. Carmichael's reception, and took a seat on the sofa near Thorndyce, who was impatiently waiting the appearance of his wife and niece.

"You are always ready, and never keep a fellow waiting," he said, with a welcoming smile. "But it takes Iva an interminable while to fasten the last flower and the last bit of lace."

"You must not compare me to Iva. The

lark sings, you know; but the wren only chirps, and wears a very plain brown dress. Iva and Agnes are, no doubt, preparing themselves to carry the hearts of Mrs. Carmichael's guests by storm, and they must be allowed time in which to do it. They are both very beautiful, and you," looking up at him a little wistfully, "are very happy, are you not, with your lovely wife?"

"I am indeed. But how is it, Marguerite, that you, who know so well how to make others happy, should have missed of happiness for yourself?"

"I was young, and did not then know gold from its counterfeit; besides, we are always wiser for others than we are for ourselves," she answered, guardedly.

"How are we looking, Uncle? Armed for conquest, are we not, though already conquered and the slaves of wretched man?" cried Iva, entering the room at the moment with Agnes, the two beautiful brides walking side by side, the one as fair as a lily, and the other dark and brilliantly charming, with lips and cheeks as warmly colored as the leaves of a provence rose.

"You are perfection," replied Thorndyce, with unfeigned admiration. "Absolute perfection; and I forgive you for keeping me waiting so long."

Iva wore her wedding dress of heavy white silk, brightened and enriched here and there with knots of lace and carnations, while Agnes was attired in pale blue silk nearly covered with old Venetian point, which looked as if it might have been made by the fairies, but never by mortal fingers. Her ornaments were simply flowers. White marguerites and rose purple heliotrope nestled in her golden hair, in the lace upon her bosom, and all among her diaphanous draperies as if blown there by the summer winds.

"I am not jealous of my fair aunt, Mrs. Ware, only as regards the lace. *That* does go to my heart, and envy and all uncharitableness seize upon me like a dragon whenever I see it. Lewis told me ever so long ago that he preferred brunettes to blondes, and so set my mind easy on that score; did n't you, dear?" turning to her husband, who just then entered the apartment.

"You must not repeat all the nonsense I told you before we were married, Iva."

"Nonsense! You were a very wicked person, then, to go and say what you did not mean," replied Iva, with a great assumption of offended dignity.

"Do I please you, Allen?" whispered Agnes, putting her little hand on his shoulder. "You know I only care to please you."

"And you always do please me, my darling, always. But here is Elise with your wraps, and now we are ready to go."

A quarter of an hour later there swept into Mrs. Carmichael's magnificent parlors two as handsome young wives as ever trod a carpet, and two prouder husbands never lived than were Allen Thorndyce and Lewis Hallack. Marguerite was there, too, talking with Gerald Delhousie, an old friend, whom she chanced to meet the moment of her arrival, and who knew everybody worth knowing in Washington.

"I do not see anything of the Waldemars," he observed, looking around the room inquisitorily. "At Mrs. May's dinner-party, last week, my lady Waldemar was given the cut direct, and they say she feels the slight keenly."

"I have never met Mrs. Waldemar, but have often heard her spoken of as being a very beautiful and much-courted lady."

"She is, indeed, gloriously beautiful, but as heartless and as vindictive as any Jezebel, and one whose motto is to rule or ruin. But of late her power has been on the wane, and Society, that once bowed itself humbly at her feet, now turns up its fickle nose, and whispers all manner of evil things which, true or false, must needs prove fatal to her ambition, and any hopes she may have of future triumphs."

While they were conversing together, neither dreaming of the part Mrs. Waldemar had played in the destruction of Marguerite's happiness, Agnes, feeling warm and a little tired, stole into the conservatory, where it was cool and quiet and she could be alone. On one side was a row of superb azaleas in full bloom, and below them a glowing bank of geraniums, growing amid a perfume of scented waters falling from a marble fountain half hidden by their fragrant foliage. No woman could look more sweetly beautiful than did Agnes as she stood gazing at the flowers, with clasped hands and bowed head, a kind of thoughtful humility expressed in her attitude and in her down-looking eyes. Agnes Brandon must have died long ago. Allen Thorndyce's wife and the poor waif of Gillingham Row could never be one and the same. The brooding shadow in her eyes deepened until she gazed at the geraniums through fast-falling tears. A slight sound in the vicinity of a great aloe startled her. She turned quickly to see who it might be, and

stood face to face with Maurice Ware. Agnes grew white as death; even her hands grew pale, and her very breath hushed itself on her lips.

"Agnes!"

The utterance of her name recalled her to herself, and the indignant blood surged back to lips and heart again in a crimson tide.

"Mrs. Thorndyce, if you please, sir."

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Thorndyce. I wish to speak to you, and—"

"You cannot possibly have anything to say to me which I care to hear."

"Not if I were to ask you to forgive the past, and tell you that which I—"

"There is no forgiveness for a past such as you made of mine, and I will not listen to you—I will not. Leave me, sir!"

A handsome man still, and a firm one, he merely smiled when she bade him leave her, and his fine, dark eyes never once left her face.

"You were always beautiful; but, to-night, Agnes, you are loveliness itself."

"Stop! Not another word of that kind. From you, sir, it is an insult," she said, a world of indignant scorn lighting her gentle eyes.

"Yet I loved you," he answered, with the same quiet smile.

"Loved me? I'd pity the meanest thing that crawls the earth were it so unfortunate as to be the object of *your* love! You are false, Maurice Ware, false to the heart's core. I know it, and I know you."

"Let that be as it may, still, I say, you are the only woman I have ever really loved. I am one to trample on my own heart when it stands in the way of my ambition, and when I left you under the pines at Somerton, I left my heart there also. A man must do such things sometimes if he would make his life successful. Since then it has been merely folly, and a weariness of spirit. A poor tale to tell."

"A very poor tale, indeed."

"You have grown proud and bitter, as well as rich and happy, since we parted; but will you not give me your hand, and say that you forgive me?"

"No, not to save my life would I permit my hand to rest in yours even for a single instant. It belongs to the man who made me his wife, and who loves and trusts me, notwithstanding the blight and ruin you made of my youth."

"Does your husband—does Allen Thorndyce know of—of me?"

"He does."

"And you love him?"

"I love the very earth his feet have trodden upon, and into that higher sanctuary of my heart where I have placed him *you* never entered. It was gratitude I felt for you; for him it is love, joy, heaven! Give you my hand? If I could burn away the stain your touch left upon it years ago, I'd not hesitate to hold it in the fire, I do assure you, Maurice Ware!"

She left him without so much as a parting look, and went straight to her husband.

"What is the matter, dear? Have you seen a ghost?" he asked, lightly.

"Yes; the ghost of the past. Take me home, Allen, please take me home."

He put his arm around her and drew her head down upon his breast, and if ever in her life she thanked God that she had never deceived him it was then.

"Not at all, my child. There is no ghost, past or present, sufficiently terrible to necessitate our going home."

"But you do not know?"

"Yes, I do. Hallack just told me."

"And you do not mind?"

"No." Thorndyce's lips uttered the word carelessly enough; but in his heart he could have strangled Maurice Ware and felt he was doing the world good service.

"Here comes Iva; and now, for my sake, dear, call back your roses, and let's show the ghost a smiling countenance."

For his sake? What would she not do for his sake!

"Oh, Agnes, I've been searching everywhere for you," said Iva, joining them as she spoke. "And who do you suppose I saw in the conservatory just now? Who, to be sure, but Mr. Ware, looking as glum as an owl and as handsome as Lucifer. You don't know him! Well, you are fortunate. I wish I did n't, for it was I who introduced him to Marguerite."

"And a precious pretty pickle you got her in, too," replied Allen, speaking for his wife, and standing so as to screen her face from view.

"The Ausonians long ago repented that ever they received Troy into their bosom," classically apologized Mrs. Hallack. "But that is not the question. I came for Agnes. Mrs. Page is dying to hear her sing, and will not take no for an answer."

"Do you wish me to sing this evening, Allen?" she asked, with a look in her eyes he alone knew the nature of.

"Yes, dear; if you feel well enough."

"That settles it, I know; for never was there a more obedient wife than my gentle aunt," said Iva, leading the way to the instrument.

Among those gathered around the piano was an elegantly-attired lady, with great luminous black eyes and shadowy masses of purple-black hair. At a little distance stood Marguerite, her face quite white and her lips firmly set. She touched Delhousie on the arm.

"Who is the lady in rose-colored velvet and duchess lace?"

Delhousie smiled. "Ah, I see you have not been long in Washington, if you do not know the lady in rose-colored velvet. That is Mrs. Waldemar, a sort of Becky Sharp, I believe, without the benefit of the doubt. She knows every move on the political chess-board, and is doing her best to persuade the President to appoint her husband to a first-class mission abroad. A foreign court is certainly the place of all others to develop talents such as hers."

"Thank you, Mr. Delhousie."

Marguerite turned away and immediately sought out Lewis.

"Please be so kind, Mr. Hallack, as to order the carriage. I am going to make my adieu to Mrs. Carmichael, and then — home."

"You are not ill, Mrs. Ware?"

"No; only tired, and — and —"

"I understand you; but you must not go alone."

"Yes; I do not wish to spoil your pleasure."

Mr. Hallack saw her to her carriage, and Mrs. Ware was driven rapidly back to the hotel, which she had left scarcely an hour before, little thinking that she would meet at Mrs. Carmichael's, and recognize in Mrs. Waldemar, the "veiled mystery" of Morceau's.

Among many brilliant song-birds one tiny brown wren is never missed; so Marguerite went her way, and the song and the dance and the music went gayly on. If the soul of old Paglioni were hovering anywhere near, it must have thrilled with delight when the clear, sweet voice of Agnes first made itself heard in that crowded assemblage. Whispers and footfalls died into silence, and rich and full swelled the notes through the splendid apartments. In the doorway, intently listening, and with his eyes fixed earnestly on the beautiful singer, stood Maurice Ware. In very truth, he was nothing to Agnes now,—he saw that plainly enough,—and the look of love in her lifted eyes—eyes that sought no face save that of Allen Thorn-

dyce — told him her heart was indeed with her husband.

"You are behaving like a perfect simpleton," said a displeased voice at his elbow. "Who are you staring at, pray?"

"No one in particular."

"Do you know the name of the lady who is singing?"

"No."

"You should be presented," sneered the lady in rose-colored velvet; "for I see it's a veritable case of love at first sight."

"Mrs. Waldemar speaks, no doubt, from a large and varied experience."

"Mr. Ware is pleased to be facetious."

"And will bid you good-evening, madam. I am going home."

"But I am not."

"That is of no consequence to me."

"It is not?" turning on him her flashing eyes. "And you pretend not to know Mrs. Thordyce?"

"Whether I do or do not, Mrs. Waldemar, is no business of yours."

"Possibly I may make it my business! Will it be news for you to hear that this Mrs. Thordyce and your wife are bosom friends?"

"You will oblige me, madam, by not mentioning my wife's name. It comes with an ill grace from you, or would if you were not a woman long since past the period of blushing."

"Sir!"

"Bah! don't affect any fine-lady airs with me. It's but a waste of breath. I know you, Mrs. Waldemar. I never deceived you, and you never deceived me. But you are nearing your social death, so gather your roses while you may, for averted heads and distant nods have their meaning, as no one knows better than yourself."

"Villain! and you dare talk like this to me?" she hissed, white with anger. "Heed what you say, sir; for if *you* presume to openly insult me—you whose stepping-stone to place and power has been from first to last a woman's heart—I say, and say it boldly, you will find me dangerous. If my social death be an assured fact, then we die together, Maurice Ware; for I swear by heaven, that which pulls me down shall not exalt you."

"Poor little tempest in a tea-pot!" he smiled, scornfully. "Your angry threats are no more to me than the feeble whispering of the idle winds. Adieu, and forever, fair Verona. This tree bears no more roses for your gathering."

They began to fade the day your friendship cost me my wife's love and respect. They are quite withered now, Verona, withered and dead."

He turned on his heel and left her, with a low, mocking laugh that sounded horribly ominous of evil to the ears of the proud and bitterly incensed woman whom he had once professed to madly love.

Verona stood looking after him with clinched hands and stormily-heaving bosom.

"So, you also despise me? Fool! to think I'd bear *your* scorn tamely. 'Tis treachery arrayed against treachery, and the one who wins — *lives!*"

A rose-velvet robe, shimmered over with lace and flowers, swept royally from the room, and Verona, too, was gone.

CHAPTER XXV.

Like a pent-up flood, swoln to the height,
He pour'd his griefs into my breast with tears.
Such as the manliest men in their cross'd lives
Are sometimes forced to shed.

JOANNA BAILLIE.

MARGUERITE!"

Mrs. Ware looked up from her writing, and saw, standing in the doorway, the pale face and visibly agitated form of Hugh Fairring. She could not speak for a moment, so great was her astonishment. He came forward uninvited, threw himself in the nearest chair, and gave way to a passionate burst of tears.

"I could not help coming, Marguerite, I could not! Believe me mad, weak, foolish, anything; but see you I must!"

She took his hand and held it encouragingly in hers. "What has happened? What is it that troubles you?"

"This. I love you, Marguerite!"

She dropped his hand, and drew back as suddenly as if he had dealt her a blow.

"Don't turn from me, don't misunderstand me! I've been misunderstood and misjudged all my life. For God's sake, let there be *one* person in the world who knows my heart, one who does not doubt and distrust me!"

"Mr. Fairring, I am disposed to judge you kindly, for I—"

She stopped, confused and alarmed. What was it the still, small voice was saying? What trembling, strange, happy knowledge was it that, all in a second, leaped into life, and stayed, unuttered, upon her lips, the words she would have spoken? Is it the sense of loving or of being

loved that is the most precious to us? A new, beautiful light shone in her eyes, but she could not do a positive wrong either to herself or to another, and very gravely and earnestly she said,—

"I dare not trifle with the love I see written in your face, for it speaks there as plainly as do your words; but as this is the beginning, so, too, must it be the end. 'Tis trespassing on grounds where both you and I are forbidden to walk— forbidden by God's law and by man's; forbidden by our own consciences and every sense of truth and right. True, our lives are a disappointment, but they are clean. We would not wade through mire, though it were to reach the fairest lily that ever bloomed. You understand me, dear friend? You comprehend my meaning?"

"I do indeed, and all I ask is to know that the lily is there."

"So there are stars in the sky and pearls at the bottom of the sea; but who can possess himself of the one or gather the other?"

"Not any one; but we can see the star, though it be a million miles away, and it is joy unutterable to know that the pearl is there, though it be lying fathoms deep in the sea."

Her answer was a smile,—only a sad, little, uncertain smile,—but it satisfied him entirely. He had asked no more than that, and he could live now anywhere and be happy. He returned home the following day, and those who had thought him old wondered at the change which had come over Mr. Fairring. He was positively growing young again.

Marguerite sat alone in her room, late one night, thinking, not of Hugh Fairring, but of her husband, whom men that day, for the first time, called Senator Ware. He had at last reached the goal of his proudest ambition, and the legislative body which unanimously confirmed his nomination, sincerely believed they were sending to the United States Senate not only an able jurist, but a pure-minded, upright, conscientious man, also.

A slow, irresolute step halted outside her door. Could it be?—no; impossible! The step passed on, but again returned, paused, and immediately thereafter a light tap sounded on the door.

Marguerite arose and opened it. Her memory had not misled her.

"Mr. Ware! You here, and at this hour?"

"Have I not some right to be here, Marguerite?"

"No, sir; you have not."

"I wish to speak to you for a moment; may I?"

"I am listening; go on."

He entered and closed the door after him.

"If you will have it so, I admit I have no right here, and will only ask you to extend towards me the courtesy due a stranger."

"Sit down, if you please, and I will hear what you have to say."

"Are you happy, Marguerite?"

"That is a very strange question for you to ask me. Happy? Yes—in my way."

"And I am miserable."

"Indeed! I did not suppose that one who dealt out misery so liberally to others could, by any possible chance, ever be miserable himself."

"We never loved madly, and parted in no fine phrensy, for your nature is as cold as mine is selfish; but there was a time when I did really care for you."

Marguerite's face never moved a muscle.

"That was when you thought I might be useful to you, and you had yet your way to make in the world. But the past *is* past and forever beyond our recall, nor do I wish it otherwise, for I have no desire to live that period of my life over again;" then a little sharply, as if determined not to let her feelings get the better of her pride, "Have you anything further to say? if so, speak, and please be as brief as you can; for it is late, and I am feeling very weary?"

"Only this. Would you like to be legally free, Marguerite?"

"Not unless you particularly desire it. Mrs. Waldemar, I believe, is married."

A look of grim negation crossed Mr. Ware's face. Further than this he did not reply; and Marguerite went on, in a low, questioning tone of voice,—

"If I understand your meaning rightly, you came to tell me that I may have my freedom, if I so desire it, and that you do not especially admire Mrs. Waldemar?"

"Yes; that is about it."

"Then we may consider the interview ended; and so, good-night, Mr. Ware," she said, turning from him with a cold bow of dismissal, which, however, he did not choose to notice, for he continued very calmly, though evidently with much feeling,—

"For some reason, which I cannot quite account for, I had a strange desire to see Agnes and Marguerite, since they were friends, and I had wronged them both, and to say to each

'forgive me,' whether they would or not. I have done so, and will now relieve you of my presence."

Straight and handsome he stood, with his strong white hand resting upon the back of a blue damask chair; but still he lingered, and an odd sort of a smile flitted shadow-like over his finely expressive features.

"Jeannette, I remember, was a firm believer in presentiments. If I were at all superstitious, I'd think a death-owl had been hooting in my vicinity, so depressing have been my thoughts for the past few days. Farewell, and if it be forever, why you will be none the worse if I do as I did that evening at The Maples, and kiss good-by for all time to come the little brown wren that chirped so blithely before she knew me."

He bent his grandly noble head—Maurice Ware always looked the very king of men—and kissed her twice on lips and cheek.

"Good-by, Marguerite. After all, you know you are my wife, near—yes, and dear to me, the one woman whose love brought me no dishonor."

"Oh, Maurice, I—I—"

"You forgive me?"

"I forgive you."

"Good-by, then, once again, Marguerite."

The next moment he was gone, and Marguerite was alone, with a dread foreboding of evil at her heart, and a something of love, tenderness, and regret that filled her eyes with tears, and made her wish it were possible to forget the past and revive anew the old faith and the old affection.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A deed without a name.—MACBETH.

MRS. WALDEMAR was restlessly pacing to and fro in her luxurious drawing-room when a servant opened the door, briefly announced Mr. Ware, and obsequiously retired. The tall Senator walked into the apartment with a half frown on his brow, and anything but a cordial manner.

"So you are come at last, Maurice?"

"Yes; and much against the promptings of my better judgment."

"Do not be alarmed. Mr. Waldemar is in New York, and will not return until to-morrow."

"Pooh! I am not alarmed on that score. You are far too skilled a diplomatist to have a

troublesome husband around when his presence is not desirable."

"You choose to be ironical, Maurice. Some might think it ungenerous, even unmanly; but I—I feel that it is deserved."

Strangely enough, his cutting sarcasm did not appear to anger her as it had done at Mrs. Carmichael's reception. Then she was all fire and fury, now she was all meekness and humility.

"Though I may so little merit your respect, is there not one pleasant memory left of all the past sufficiently tender to induce you to be less severe in your reproaches?"

"Not one. There is nothing left of the past but remorse, regret, and shame, though it was for you I threw away my wife and home, and ruthlessly trod under foot the heart of as pure and true a woman as ever lived."

"You never loved your wife, and I doubt if she ever really cared for you; but I did love you, Maurice, and I do still, though you are so cruel."

What an actress she was! How her voice faltered; how naturally the tears sprang to her eyes; how her lips quivered; and how timidly she put her beautiful hand in his.

"I am not like Marguerite—there are few so good as she; but you—oh, Maurice, with all the world turning against me, it is hard that you, too, should join hands with my enemies!"

"I am not your enemy, Verona. I could never be that," manifestly softened by her tears. "I threw away wife and home for you; but I do not intend to sacrifice myself, by any manner of means."

"No; you will never do that, and while your star rises mine goes down. Senator Ware will be all-powerful, for he will always remember *himself*, and men who do that are sure of success. The President is your warm friend. He will deny you nothing. Oh, Maurice, have some pity! If I could only get away from the gilded sham they call society—away from the malice and envy and gossip, I might live down the past. You have but to ask it, and the Berlin mission is yours, and, being yours, mine."

Maurice looked at her queerly.

"If the President were to send in Mr. Waldemar's name, think you the Senate would confirm his nomination to so important an office?"

"You will be there to see that it does."

"A Richelieu in petticoats, if ever there was one! To speak in plain terms, you want me to use my influence, first with the President, and afterwards with the Senate, to get this man

Waldemar—I beg pardon, your husband—appointed Minister to the German Court?"

"Yes. You *can* do it. *Will* you, Maurice?"

"No."

She drew a short, quick breath.

"You will not?"

"I will not."

"Then the hope is dead. And, oh, to think that it should be your hand to fall so heavily upon me!"

She threw herself sobbing at his feet, a mass of purple-black hair trailing over his knees, and a round white arm lying like snow against the crimson roses of the carpet. He heard the sobs, he felt the trembling of her slender form, but he did not see the watchful devil in her eyes, nor the desperate firmness of her scarlet mouth. He raised her up gently, touched by her apparent distress.

"I am sorry for you, very sorry, Verona; but when you ask me to shoulder Monsieur Waldemar, a man of no ability whatever, carry him into the Senate by sheer force of argument, and hand him out again ticketed 'from Washington to Berlin direct,' you ask too much."

"Perhaps I do," she sighed, resignedly; "but I wanted to go abroad so much. You do not blame me for that, or think unkindly of me for trying to retain the place I have so long held in fashionable society, do you?"

"No. But your day is past, Verona, and a graceful retirement is all that is now left to you."

"And you?" she lifted her head and laid it against his bearded cheek, looking up in his eyes with a clear, steady, unflinching gaze. "And you, Maurice?"

"I? Well, as you said, Verona, my star has but just arisen."

"And its zenith and its setting are—where?"

"That no man knoweth."

"Nor woman, either. Suppose, Maurice,"—her lips were now where her cheek had lain,—"suppose, Maurice, it should set suddenly, stop in mid-heaven, shoot like a lightning flash down a cloudless sky, and vanish forever from the sight of men?"

"What, are you, too, prophetically inclined this evening, or are you only talking to hear yourself talk?" he asked, regarding her uneasily.

"Only just to hear myself talk. You will let me send you to your hotel; it is getting late, and a storm coming up?"

"No. I will walk: it is not far."

" You will not accept from me even so small a favor as the half-hour use of my carriage ? Cruel Maurice ! " touching the bell as she spoke. " But I will have my way in this, since it is not the Berlin mission, nor anything so very atrocious," with a light laugh. " Robert," turning to the servant who came in answer to her summons, " Tell Mills to bring around the coupé, and be sure that he drives Black Prince. I noticed one of the carriage-horses was a little lame this morning."

Scarcely ten minutes elapsed before Robert again presented himself, with the concise, " Mills wishes to see you, if you please, my lady."

Mrs. Waldemar excused herself to her guest, and went out in the hall, where Mills was waiting, hat in hand and buttoned to the eyes.

" If you please, Mrs. Waldemar, I 'm somart timersome about driving Black Prince. He 's wild and fractious natterly, and afraid of everything at night. You know he came near smashing the coupé last week, and nigh about a-killing of us both ; and so I think it 's better, with your permission, to drive the bays."

" No. Black Prince and the coupé, and be as quick as possible. Mr. Ware is waiting."

" But it is not safe to —"

" Black Prince, I say, and no other. Obey me ! " she commanded, sternly. The old coachman bowed, and went to do her bidding, devoutly wishing his mistress had less temper and more common sense.

Black Prince, a vicious beast as black as night and full of all manner of wicked tricks, was quickly brought around. The lamps threw an unsteady light over the animal's proudly arched neck and impatiently tossing head. Senator Ware came down the marble steps, opened the door of the coupé, and sprang in. Two glittering black eyes from behind the closely-drawn lace curtains watched eagerly his every motion, and a pair of scarlet lips, shut tightly over milk-white teeth, whispered exultingly,—

" If your star sets to-night, Maurice Ware, mine will still be shining ! "

Mills had Black Prince well in hand, and was on the lookout for any extra display of temper. The animal's first eccentric manœuvre was to rear upright, champ savagely his foam-flecked bit, let fly his heels a few times in rapid succession, and then come down on his feet like a thunder-clap and start off at a tremendous pace. A second, and he had dashed around

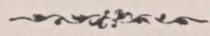
the corner and was spinning along the Avenue like a whirlwind. A piece of white paper flew across the street — a snort, a bound, a swerving to the right and then to the left, and he was off like an arrow.

Mills was doing his best; but the frightened animal was utterly beyond his control. His only hope was to keep him in the road, and pull hard for his life. The street was wide, the hour near midnight, and the way clear. Not a sound was heard from the occupant of the flying coupé, yet a man sat therein with a face of ashes and a heart of fire.

" A traitorous, evil-minded woman, with a velvet tongue and a demon's soul ! This is her revenge ! " he muttered, and then sat calm, frozen, stupefied, awaiting his fate.

Just before reaching Capitol Hill the fore-wheels struck the curbstone, the coupé was smashed to atoms, and on the sidewalk, with his skull crushed in and oozing thick, black drops of blood, lay Maurice Ware. The horse wheeled like a flash, and clatter, clatter, clatter went his iron-shod hoofs up the Avenue again,— past Mills, lying senseless in the middle of the street, past the lifeless body of the young Senator, past the heavy policeman who tried in vain to stop him, flew the maddened beast. Verona heard Black Prince gallop furiously past her window ; saw his reeking sides, wide open mouth, and glaring eyes ; saw his broken harness, the gathering crowd — saw, and rejoiced !

" It was death or my will, Maurice Ware, and you chose death ! It was treachery against treachery, and *I have won !*"



CHAPTER XXVII.

They sin who tell us love can die !
With life all other passions fly,
All others are but vanity. SOUTHEY.

A SHUFFLING sound as of many moving feet awakened Marguerite from a deep sleep. She threw on her dressing-gown, opened the door of her chamber, and asked the colored servant she saw, standing scared and trembling in the hall-way, the cause of the unwonted commotion.

" Da is bringin' in de gentleman what 's done been frowd from his carriage and killed," replied Sam, a very black bell-boy.

" Killed ? "

"Yes; dead. Fell on his head, and never known nuffin arter it."

"Did you learn the gentleman's name?"

"I heard 'em say as how it was Senator Ware. Lor a mighty, missus, is it your—"

The door shut quickly; a woman fell on her knees within, clasped her hands over her white face, and neither spoke nor stirred till Allen Thorndyce put his hand on her shoulder, and gently asked,—

"Where shall we bring him, Marguerite?"

She arose, lifted to Thorndyce her calm, forgiving eyes, and said,

"To me. Bring him to me."

Dark and handsome still Maurice Ware lay in his coffin, his star quite set, and his ambitious heart at rest. All the loving and the hating, all the hoping and the longing was over. In the twinkling of an eye he had passed from life, and he who but yesterday walked proudly among his fellows, calling none of them his peer, was to-day only a senseless piece of clay awaiting its consignment to the bosom of mother earth.

Verona Waldemar smiled when she read an account of the "accident" in the morning papers.

"He refused me the Berlin mission; but I sent him to a much higher court, where neither the will of the President, nor that of the Senate, is needed to appoint or to retain him in office. And poor Mills nearly killed, too! Black Prince's tragic runaway will serve for a nine days' talk, and then, like Maurice Ware, will be forgotten."

A darkened chamber, a mysterious, awful silence, an odor of tuberoses and violets, a velvet-covered casket, and a woman looking sorrowfully down on a dead man's pallid face—a woman fair and girlish, with blue eyes and golden hair, and a child's sweet, tremulous mouth.

"Oh, Maurice! Maurice!"

One by one the years passed in review until they brought back the time when he, who lay here as rigid and cold as marble, was her idol. She softly put her hand on his. The lace of her sleeve swept over his pillow and dark, heavy hair. Oh, how the pines were moaning, moaning! How thick and fast old memories crowded to her heart!

A light, slow footfall without. Agnes turned to flee. Too late. Marguerite had entered the room.

For a moment they looked at each other in utter silence, one standing on either side of the casket, with Maurice Ware's grandly handsome face lying white and still between them, in all the imposing majesty of death's serene tranquillity.

"No more—never again to trouble our hearts—our *forgiven* dead!" whispered Agnes, as she passed swiftly from the apartment, and Marguerite was left alone with all that was mortal of Maurice Ware.



CHAPTER XXVIII.

Not heaven itself upon the past has power;
But what has been has been, and I have had my hour.

DRYDEN.

HUGH FAIRRING heard of Mr. Ware's death with much emotion, but it can hardly be said that he in anywise regretted that gentleman's sudden taking off. To him the birds sang Marguerite, the winds whispered Marguerite, and leaf and bud, sky, earth, and air all spoke of Marguerite. People marvelled at the change which had taken place in him, he was looking so well and happy, and a few pious but undiscerning souls thought Mr. Fairring must have "gotten religion," which seems preposterous, in view of the fact that he must have gotten it in Washington, where the commodity is generally supposed to be scarce.

Again it is September, and under the old elm-tree at The Maples are sitting Marguerite and Iva. Mrs. Hallack has an open letter in her hand, post-marked Vevay, Switzerland, written by Mrs. Clarence Sloper, formerly Miss Kate Morris, and received within the hour.

"MY DEAREST COUSIN IVA," the letter began. "I do believe I am the happiest wife in the whole world! Clarence is all a husband should be, and I don't see how I ever could have thought him stupid. We go everywhere and see everybody; and who do you suppose we met at the hotel, this morning, but that dear, good Mr. Fairring we all liked so much at the White Sulphur Springs that summer. He is very much improved. His wife died a year ago, and since then he has been abroad. He is not so very old either, only forty-seven or so, and I would not be at all surprised if he were to return, and—well, you know he always did admire Marguerite, and they are just suited to each other. A terrible thing occurred here last week. An American lady, a Mrs. Waldemar, at one time a great beauty, and all the rage at

Washington, was found dead in her room at one of the cheap lodging-houses near the lake. It is whispered that she took her own life, poor thing! And she had reason to, for she had neither money nor friends, and life under such circumstances must be a burden. I have the loveliest set of diamonds, and some laces which I think are quite as beautiful and rare as Mrs. Thordyce's, and so will you, no doubt, when you come to see them. But I have forgotten to tell you of another melancholy affair which took place only yesterday, and which quite scandalized the fashionable quarter of the town. Mr. Linde, who also hails from the land of liberty, and who was formerly a lawyer of some prominence, made free, it seems, with certain trust funds, and in one way and another embezzled, defrauded, and otherwise appropriated sufficient means to enable him to live at Geneva in princely style. But the law found him out, and yesterday he was arrested, and is now on his way to America a prisoner. Oh, my! how can men do such wicked things, when they know they are sure to be punished for it?"

The letter contained about ten pages more of closely lined and interlined gossip, plentifully punctuated with "Clarence says this" and "Clarence thinks that," which Iva considerably refrained from inflicting upon Marguerite.

"God's justice never sleeps," Mrs. Ware said, solemnly. "Mrs. Waldemar and Mr. Linde have but reaped the fruits of their own sowing."

"And if Mr. Fairring were to return, would you—"

"No castle-building, Iva. Mr. Fairring has lived his day, and so have I. He has learned to be happy, and—"

"But it was you who taught him, as you have so many others, *how* to be happy?"

"No; I only taught him how to live."

"As you did Lewis and Agnes, and nobody knows how many more. Lewis told me all about it."

"Mr. Hallack thinks far too kindly of me."

"No one could do that, Marguerite. Have you heard from Mr. Fairring since he has been abroad?"

"Yes. Once."

"Only once?"

"Only once. Don't look so disappointed, dear. He sent me a lily,—not a flower, fresh and fragrant, with the dew of morning upon it, but one made of pearls that had lain for years in the depths of some Eastern sea,—and asked me to keep it until his return."

"And you kept it, Marguerite?"

"I said that the lily lacked life, that the pearls had lain too long in the sea, and if I kept it, it would simply be as a jewel lost, not a jewel found."

"Oh, Marguerite!"

"But my answer did not pain him. You have just heard that he is happy. He understands me. Love knows no time nor distance. Even death cannot destroy it. My life here is not without its sunshine. There may be shadows; but I shrink from them no more. They are old friends; and yonder, almost within sight of my home, lies my husband, and there is my resting-place when I shall have done with life."

The sun dropped slowly behind the hills. A yellow leaf drifted down from the elm-tree. The day was done. The summer had past. The sun disappeared in a flood of mellow light, and its last pale rays fell softly on the sweet, calm face of Marguerite.

THE END.

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